New European Commentary

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MATTHEW

CHAPTER 1

1:1 *The book of the generation*- "Book", Gk. *biblos*, suggests a formal volume. It could be that Matthew refers only to the genealogy- but in this case, *biblos* hardly seems the appropriate word. The Gospels were transcripts of the Gospel message preached by e.g. Matthew, and as time went on and the Lord didn't return, under inspiration they wrote down their standard accounts of the good news. The Greek *genesis* translated "generation" is also translated "nature" in its' other two occurrences (James 1:23; 3:6). If the "book" refers to the book of the Gospel of Matthew, the idea could be that this is a Gospel which focuses upon the nature of Jesus. Related words occur often in the genealogies- people "begat" [Gk. *gennao*] their descendants, until Jesus was *gennao* of Mary (Mt. 1:16). Jesus as a person had a 'genesis', He was 'generated' by Mary as His ancestors had been 'generated' by the 'generations' of their ancestors- the whole chapter is a huge blow to the idea that Jesus pre-existed as a person before His birth. His 'generation' is presented as being of the same nature as the 'generation' of His human ancestors.

The son of David, the son of Abraham- The Roman emperors and Greek heroes sometimes traced their pedigree back to a god- and therefore the genealogy of Jesus, whom the Gospels present as the ultimate Emperor, is quite radical in this regard. For it traces the pedigree of Jesus back to a man, Abraham. The greatness of Jesus was in his humanity.

1:2 *Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, Jacob begot Judah and his brothers*- The fact Isaac and Jacob had brothers is carefully omitted- because the descendants of Ishmael and Esau were not counted as the people of God.

1:3 *Judah begot Perez and Zerah of Tamar and Perez begot Hezron, Hezron begot Ram*- Since the Lord was descended through the line of Phares, why mention the birth of Zara- seeing that so many details are omitted in this genealogy, even whole generations, why take space to record this? Perhaps it was because Zara was the first born, but Phares got the birthright. And the genealogies teach us how God delights to work through the underling, the rejected, the humanly weak.

Tamar was a prostitute and adulteress, just like Rahab. See on 1:5.

1:4 *Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, Nahshon begot Salmon*- Salmon was of the tribe of Judah, because this is the genealogy through Judah (1:2). The two spies who had been faithful the first time when spies were sent out were Joshua and Caleb- of the tribes of Ephraim and Judah (Num. 13:6; Jud. 2:9). It seems a fair guess that when the two spies were sent out, they were from these same two tribes. Salmon was a prince of the tribe of Judah- it's a fair guess that he was one of the two spies who went to Rahab, and he subsequently married her.

1:5 *Salmon begot Boaz of Rahab and Boaz begot Obed of Ruth and Obed begot Jesse*- Rahab was a Gentile and a sinner. Jesus was morally perfect, and yet the genealogy shows how He had much against Him spiritually. We can't blame our lack of spirituality upon our bad background. Note that there was so much intermarriage with Gentiles like Rahab and Ruth throughout Israel's history; their standing with God was therefore never on the basis of ethnic purity, but rather by cultural identity and God's grace. Matthew's genealogy features [unusually, for Jewish genealogies] several women, who had become the ancestors of Messiah through unusual relationships. It's almost as if the genealogy is there in the form that it is to pave the way for the account of Mary's conception of Jesus without a man.

1:6 *Jesse begot David the king*- Literally "*the* David *the* king". The others aren't mentioned as being kings. The implication may be that Jesus was the promised descendant of David and the promises of eternal Kingship made to David's descendant are therefore applicable to Jesus.

And David begot Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah- Literally "she of Uriah". "She that that been the wife of" is added by some translators in explanation, but isn't in the original. Whilst God 'forgets' sin in the sense that He no longer holds it against us, the memory of those sins isn't obliterated, and His word is full of such allusions to sin which although He has forgiven it and symbolically "blotted it out", it still remains within Divine history. We too can forgive but 'forgetting' isn't always possible, and is no sign that we have failed to forgive.

1:7 *And Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, Abijah begot Asa* - Wicked Roboam begat wicked Abia; wicked Abia begat good Asa; good Asa begat good Josaphat; good Josaphat begat wicked Joram. Perhaps the emphasis is that spirituality isn't genetic, and neither is sinfulness. Jesus was perfect despite being from such "bad blood"; and

we likewise can't blame our failures on bad background. Neither can we assume that the children of the faithful will be righteous.

1:8 *Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, Joram begot Uzziah*- Three generations are skipped here. See on 1:17. Perhaps the omission was because Joram married Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel the wife of Ahab, and those generations were idolaters. As we note on 1:12, children who don't worship the true God are forgotten in the ultimate course of Divine history. In this case, his iniquity was indeed visited upon the third generation (Ex. 20:3-6). We also see here a fulfilment of the prophecy that Ahab's house would be eradicated (2 Kings 9:8).

1:9 *Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, Ahaz begot Hezekiah*- The record here and in :10 seems to stress that the good beget the bad who beget the good; as if to establish the point that natural pedigree is no guarantee of spirituality. This was something the Jews needed to appreciate.

1:10 *Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, Amon begot Josiah*- See on :9.

1:11 *Josiah begot Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the captivity in Babylon*- The apparent contradiction with 1 Chron. 3:5,6 is solved if we understand this to be a reference to Joachin.

1:12 *And after the captivity in Babylon, Jechoniah begot Shealtiel, Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel*- Therefore the reference to Jechoniah being written "childless" (Jer. 22:30) perhaps means that as Jeremiah goes on to comment "No man of his seed shall prosper". If our children aren't spiritually prosperous, it is as if we were childless. Thus we see that the whole purpose of having children is to "raise a Godly seed".

1:13 *Zerubbabel begot Abiud*- Other children of Zerubbabel are recorded in 1 Chron. 3:19. But it was through one who was not otherwise of note or fame that the Lord was descended. Or perhaps Abiud was another name for one of the sons listed there. The apparent contradiction with Lk. 3:27 is solved if we read that as "which was the son of Rhesa Zerubbabel". See on :16.

Abiud begot Eliakim, Eliakim begot Azor- This part of the genealogy is not found in the Old Testament. We wonder whether God as it were beamed this information into Matthew, or whether he did his own research through public registers and was Divinely guided and inspired in his findings and how he recorded it.

1:14 *Azor begot Sadoc, Sadoc begot Achim, Achim begot Eliud*- Matthew is presenting the line through Judah. But there was a Levite at this time also called "Zadok" (Neh. 10:21). It could be that this person was descended from both Judah and Levi through an inter-tribal marriage of his parents. In this case he would've been a potential king-priest, preparing the way for us to understand Jesus as a king-priest.

1:15 *Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, Matthan begot Jacob*- The genealogies prove that Joseph was a descendant of David, indeed the rightful king of Israel had there been a monarchy at the time of Jesus. Jesus was his adopted son; he was "as was supposed", or 'as was reckoned by law', the son of Joseph (Lk. 3:23). The record in Luke appears to be that of Mary; Joseph being "the son of Heli" was probably by reason of marrying Mary, the daughter of Heli (Lk. 3:23); the Talmud speaks with gross vitriolic about Mary the daughter of Heli going to hell for her blasphemy, referring to Mary the mother of Jesus. This shows that the Jews accept that Mary was the daughter of Heli. Heli's father was Matthat, who can be equated with Matthan the grandfather of Joseph. Thus Mary and Joseph were cousins (hinting at an arranged marriage?), and therefore Jesus was a son of David through both his mother and father by adoption. In the light of this it is evident that the question mark over the validity of a genealogy through Joseph is an irrelevancy, seeing that Joseph and Mary had a common grandfather. The point has to be made that a humanly fabricated genealogy would be sure to make some glaring errors, especially if it was produced by simple, uneducated men as the Jews claim the New Testament was. The wonder of the New Testament genealogies is that closer study reveals ever more intricate internal evidence for their truth and reliability, rather than exposing more problems.

1:16 *Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*- Lk. 3:27 describes Zerubbabel as the head / chief / leader. The term Rhesa is incorrectly rendered in many versions as a name. Perhaps Luke's point was that the Lord Jesus was the final Messiah, after the failure of so many potential ones beforehand. 'Zerubbabel the chief' would then be a similar rubric to "David the king" in Matthew's genealogy (:6).

Joseph was actually the rightful king of Israel, according to this genealogy. Yet he was living in poverty and without recognition for who he was- exactly the kind of person God would use for the great task of raising His only begotten Son.

1:17 *So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen*

generations and from David to the captivity in Babylon fourteen generations and from the captivity in Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations- This must have some connection with the 42 stopping places before Israel reached Canaan, as described in Num.33:2. Thus the birth of Christ would be like God's people entering the promised land of the Kingdom in some way. It could be argued from this (and other evidence) that it was God's intention for the Kingdom to be entered by Israel at the time of Jesus- it was after all, His intention that Israel accepted their Messiah. But they crucified Him, and therefore the potential didn't come true. This open ended nature of God's prophetic program means that it's impossible to fit together all latter day prophecies into some chronological framework.

The genealogy presented by Matthew doesn't include every generation, there are some gaps (see on 1:8; and Zorababel was Salathiel's grandson, 1 Chron. 3:19, yet 1:12 says be "begat" him). Thus some "begat" their grandson or great grandson. Clearly Matthew had a purpose in presenting the material like this- but expositors have failed to come up with anything convincing. It could simply be that the Gospels were designed to be memorized, as most Christians were illiterate; and the 3 x 14 structure was to aid memorization. One interesting observation is that the last 14 generations from the captivity to the time of Christ amount to the 490 years prophesied for this same period by Dan. 9:25- if we take a generation to be 35 years, which it is in Job 42:16. The numerical value of the Hebrew word "David" is 14, so it could also be that Matthew is eloquently demonstrating that Jesus was indeed the promised seed of David. If indeed six is the number of man and seven represents perfection, then 6 x 7 = 42- the generations culminated in the perfect man, Jesus.

1:18 *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit*- The Greek seems to imply she was understood ["found"] to be with a child which had come *ek*, out of, from, the Holy Spirit. This could be implying that Joseph himself believed or perceived that the child was from the Holy Spirit. This would explain why he sought not to humiliate her publicly about the matter (1:19).

The descriptions of Mary as keeping things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,52), and the way it seems she didn't tell Joseph about the Angel's visit, but instead immediately went down to Elisabeth for three months… all these are indications that Mary, like many sensitive people, was a very closed woman. Only when Mary was "found" pregnant by Joseph (Mt. 1:18- s.w. to see, perceive, be obvious) was the situation explained to him by an

Angel. It seems His move to divorce her was based on his noticing she was pregnant, and she hadn't given any explanation to him. She "arose" after perhaps being face down on the ground as the Angel spoke with her, and went immediately off to Elisabeth. And then, after three months she returns evidently pregnant (Lk. 1:39). Mary is portrayed as somehow separate from the other ministering women. It would have been psychologically impossible, or at best very hard, for the mother of the Lord to hang around with them. The group dynamics would have been impossible. Likewise in Acts 1:14 we have "the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus", as if she is separate from them. She followed Him to Cana, uninvited, and also to Capernaum. Next she is at the cross risking her life, but she isn't among the women who went to the grave. Why not? It was surely natural that she would go there, and that the other women would go with her to comfort her. But she was a loner; either she went alone, as I think I would have tried to, or she just couldn't face contact with the others and simply hid away. And could it be that Jesus, in recognition of her unique perception of Him, appeared to her first privately, in a rightfully unrecorded meeting? But by Acts 1:14, she was in the upper room, as if His death led her to be more reconciled to her brethren, to seek to get along with them... although by nature, in her heart and soul, she was a loner, maybe almost reclusive. A struggler to understand. A meditator, a reflector, who just wanted to be alone, one of those who take their energy from themselves rather than from other people.

1:19 *And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not willing to make her a public example, decided to send her away secretly*- The very same phrase is used by Matthew to describe Christ as the ultimately just or righteous man as He hung upon the cross (27:19,24; Lk. 23:47; 1 Pet. 3:18); the implication is surely that Joseph's just or righteousness played a role in the final perfection of Jesus as the ultimately "just man". For it was he who would've first taught Jesus the *shema*, emphasizing the word "one" as Jewish fathers did, correcting the young Jesus as He stutteringly repeated it. The same term is used about Jesus now in His heavenly glory (Acts 22:14; 1 Jn. 2:1) and as He will be at the day of judgment (2 Tim. 4:8); the influence of parents upon their children is in some sense eternal. For Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever; we too, as the sum of all the influences upon us, will really be saved and immortalized as persons. And the same was true of Jesus; hence the words and style of Mary's hymn of praise can be found repeated in the later words of Jesus, and also in the words He spoke from Heaven to the churches in Revelation. Joseph had various alternatives open to him; the trial of jealousy of Numbers 5, divorce, seeking compensation from the father, public shaming of the wife, or to stone her. But his justice was such that he sought to show grace and quietly divorce her (see on 1:20 *Take unto you*). Love protects from shame, not as it were covering

up sin which needs to be exposed, but seeking to cover over in the sense that God's atonement covers over our sins, as 1 Cor. 13 defines at length.

It was normal that the father of the crucified disposed of the body. But another Joseph, also described as a "just man" as Joseph was (Lk. 23:50), was the one who took this responsibility; remember that Joseph was alive and known as the apparent father of Jesus during His ministry (Jn. 6:42). Likewise one would think it appropriate that the first person to whom the risen Lord revealed Himself would've been to His mother, for she after all was the channel of the whole marvellous thing, the only one who for sure believed in a virgin birth. But by an apparently cruel twist of circumstance, it was to another Mary, Magdalene, that the Lord first revealed Himself, and it is she and not His mother Mary who takes the message to others. In this context we recall how in His last mortal moments, Christ motioned to His mother that John and not He was now her son (Jn. 19:26), addressing her as "woman" rather than "mother"- an unusual and even rude form of address to use to ones' mother in public. In all this we see a conscious diminishing of the human significance of the Lord's earthly family, in order to underline that now a new family of Jesus had been brought into existence by the cross. This must have been so hard for Joseph and Mary, as it is for us- to realize that we are but channels, used by God in certain ways at certain times, to the development of His glory according to His program and not our own.

1:20 *But as he thought on these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: Joseph you son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*- The descriptions of Jesus as a "man", a human being, have little meaning if in fact He pre-existed as God for millions of years before. The descriptions of Him as "begotten" (passive of *gennan* in Mt. 1:16,20) make no suggestion of pre-existence at all. And the words of the Lord Jesus and His general behaviour would have to be read as all being purposefully deceptive, if in fact He was really a pre-existent god. There is no hint of any belief in a pre-existent Jesus until the writings of Justin Martyr in the second century- and he only develops the idea in his dialogue with Trypho the Jew. The Biblical accounts of the Lord's conception and birth just flatly contradict the idea of pre-existence.

He thought- The Greek *en-thumeomai* could mean to be angry or indignant, for that is how *thumeomai* is usually translated in the NT. His anger and frustration would still be possible even if he correctly perceived that the child was from God (see on 1:18).

"Do not be afraid" was a feature of Joseph's life at this time. The three Angelic appearances to him which are recorded show him immediately responding. Such immediacy of response is typical of God's faithful servants; delay in these cases is so often an excuse for inaction and disbelief. The Greek *phobeo* is also used of reverence and awe before God. Perhaps he understandably thought that he could in no way marry and sleep with a woman who had been the channel of God's Spirit to produce His only begotten son. Those thoughts surely did cross his mind, whatever view we take of *phobeo* here. We see here the sensitivity of God to human fears and feelings; He knows our thoughts and fears perfectly, and gives the needed assurance. The message that "that which is conceived of her *is* of the Holy Spirit" would therefore have had the emphasis upon the word "is", confirming Joseph in his perception (see on 1:18- he had perceived [AV "found] that the child was of the Holy Spirit).

The implication of "take Mary as your wife" could be that they were about to marry, when it became apparent Mary was pregnant. He immediately married her (:24), seeking to protect her from the shame of the situation, thereby giving the impression that the child was his.

1:21 *And she shall give birth to a son, and you shall call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins*- But the mission of Jesus was to save "the world" (Jn. 3:17), to save those enter into Him (Jn. 10:9; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13). The "world" is ultimately the people of Christ whose sins have been forgiven.

1:22 *Now all this happened so what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying*- The present tense reflects the ongoing, living nature of God's word. Otherwise, a past tense would be required. What was spoken is still being spoken to each individual Bible reader / listener.

1:23 *The virgin shall be with child and shall give birth to a son; and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means God with us*- God *meta* us means somewhat more than simply "God with us". The idea is also "among". God is now among humanity through we who are the body of Christ.

1:24 *And Joseph woke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife*- Such immediate obedience is highly commendable, especially as marrying an already pregnant woman was bound to make the rest of his life very difficult. We think of Rebekah

and others who were immediately obedient; it is the flesh that always wishes to delay our response.

1:25 *But he did not have sexual intercourse with her until she had given birth to a son; and he called his name Jesus*- The obedience of Joseph (in this case, to :21) is emphasized. Likewise 2:20,21 “Arise... and he arose”.

CHAPTER 2

2:1 *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the king, astrologers from the east came to Jerusalem, saying*- Probably Jews from Babylon who had seen the similarity between the 'star' and the Messianic star out of Jacob whom Balaam had prophesied (Num. 24:17). Perhaps they are called here *magos*, sorcerers, magic men, because this is the image they presented to Herod, rather than stating they were Jews in search of Judah's Messianic King. Daniel had once been counted amongst the 'wise men' of Babylon (Dan. 2:48).

2:2 *Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we saw his star in the east and have come to worship him*- The star did not take them directly to Bethlehem. It may have disappeared for a while, so they went to Jerusalem, assuming the king was to be born there. This would indicate they were ignorant of Mic. 5:2, the prophecy of Messiah's birth in Bethlehem, or had at least failed to interpret the prophecy properly. Seeing that stars do not move across the sky over time in a way which can be followed on earth over a period of days or weeks, it's clear that again (see on :1), things are being described as they appeared to an observer on earth. It could be that they first saw the 'star' two years previously (see on 2:16).

Some kings become kings by revolution or war, others are born into a kingly line. They clearly understood that this king was in the kingly line of Judah- a direct descendant of David.

2:3 *And when Herod the king heard it, he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him*- "All Jerusalem" were "troubled", whereas the birth of Messiah was to be a time of joy for Israel and "to all people" (Lk. 2:10). The despised and lowly shepherds rejoiced, but "Jerusalem", perhaps referring to the Jewish ruling class, were "troubled". They rejected the good news of the Gospel because it threatened their little power structure. "All Jerusalem" cannot be taken literally because there were some in the city awaiting the birth of Messiah and joyful at the news of His birth (Lk. 2:38).

2:4 *And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born*- The priests are repeatedly described in the OT as the priests *of Yahweh*. Now they are merely the priests of the people, just as the OT "the feasts of Yahweh" become 'feasts of the Jews' in the Gospels. They hijacked Yahweh's religion and turned it into their own religion, meeting the basic religious needs of humans, rather than accepting His Truth for what it was. Biblically there was to only be one chief priest- but Israel now had several, hence the plural *chief priests*.

"Be born" is Gk. *gennao*. Messiah was procreated, gendered, beginning

within the womb of Mary- a concept incompatible with theories of a literal pre-existence of Christ.

Herod understood that the wise men were seeking the Messiah. This indicates that they were Jews who understood Messiah to be the King of Judah in David's line.

2:5 *And they said to him: In Bethlehem of Judea. For thus it is written through the prophet*- We get the impression that the reply was immediate, and that it was expected that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. When Angels appeared in praise of a baby born to a poor woman in a stable, people were not so quick to accept that God acted not according to their expectations of Him. And Judaism within the next 30 years moved away from this expectation towards a position whereby they taught that nobody could know where Messiah was from (see on Jn. 7:27).

2:6 *And you Bethlehem, land of Judah, are in no way least among the princes of Judah. For out of you shall come forth a Ruler, who shall be shepherd of My people Israel*- The emphasis is on the word "not". She was perceived as the least, but she was not in God's sight. This is so typically His style- to use the most despised and lowly in order to do His work. The same was His style with Mary.

2:8 *And he sent them to Bethlehem*- They followed this providential leading, and then the star re-appeared and confirmed them in the path (:9). Divine guidance is rarely constant, there are times when it appears to leave us and we are left to work and order our path on our own initiative, and then guidance reappears to confirm us.

And said: Go and search carefully for the young child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I may also come and worship him- "Search" is the same Greek word as in 2:7 concerning how Herod enquired diligently about Jesus. The impression is given that Herod wanted the wise men to as it were be his agents; his diligence was to be theirs. It could be that he was simply lazy to himself go to Bethlehem to see the child when it was far from confirmed that the child was in fact there.

2:9 *And they, having heard the king, went their way; and the star which they saw in the east went before them until it came and stood over where the young child was*- The star gave varying degrees of guidance- it led them to Palestine, and then to Jerusalem in general. Then it disappeared. Now it specifically pinpointed the building in Bethlehem. Divine guidance is rather similar in our lives.

2:10 *And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great*

joy- Because the star had disappeared but had now reappeared.

2:11 *And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshipped him, and opening their treasures they offered to him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh*- These three gifts are typically what was offered to kings and there are several references to kings being presented with these three things. The extent of the wise men's conviction was therefore very great. This is how much it can cost us to accept that Jesus really is Lord and King of our lives- financial expense, risk, long travel...

Note the absence of any reference to Joseph. His amazing obedience and immediacy of response to God's word wasn't rewarded by any permanent recognition. He played his role without recognition, and this is the lesson to us in our largely unrecognized and humanly unappreciated lives.

2:12 *And being warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod*- The Greek for "warned" implies 'to be answered', so it seems they had prayed to God for guidance- and now received it.

They departed for their own country by another route- As Joseph the next night likewise had an Angelic message, immediately responded and 'departed' to another country. Their obedience was an example for Joseph and Mary to follow.2:13,14 Joseph was told to arise and take Jesus to Egypt; and he arose from sleep and did it. And the same double 'arising' occurred when he left Egypt to return to Israel (Mt 2:13,14 cp. 20,21).

2:13 *Now when they had departed, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying: Arise and take the young child and his mother and flee into Egypt and stay there until I tell you, for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him*- The Hebrew idea of 'seeking' includes the idea of worship- which was exactly Herod's pretext for wanting to locate Jesus. If Joseph hadn't been obedient, would God's whole plan in the Lord Jesus have been destroyed? Presumably so, or else the whole impression given of command and obedience would be meaningless, for Joseph would've just been acting out as a puppet.

2:14 *And he arose and took the young child and his mother by night and departed into Egypt*- That same hour of the night (assuming dreams happen at night), Joseph obeyed the strange call. The observation has been made that Matthew's record has much to say about Joseph, and Mary is presented as passive; whereas in Luke, far more attention is given to Mary herself. The suggestion has been made by Tom Gaston that Joseph gave eyewitness testimony which was used by Matthew, and Mary gave such testimony to Luke. "Arose and took" was in exact obedience to 2:13 "arise and take". See on 1:25. For *Departed*- See on 2:12.

2:15 *And stayed there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt did I call My son*- One of many NT statements of the nature of inspiration of the OT writers. God spoke *dia* the prophets, they were a channel *for His word*, they were not speaking merely for and of themselves.

The emphasis is that *Joseph* fulfilled this prophecy- the grammar states that *he* was in Egypt until he was told to return. Hos. 11:1,2 speaks of how Israel were disobedient to this call: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt*...* But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me". The implication again is that Joseph had the freewill to obey this call or not- and he was obedient. For the call to leave Egypt had not been answered by Israel and it was no foregone conclusion that it would have to be by Joseph.

2:16 *Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the astrologers*- The record doesn't give the impression that the wise men did what they did because they were mocking Herod. Rather did they fear him and obeyed God's desire to foil his evil plot. But Herod perceived what they did as mocking him, and the record states things from the perspective of how he perceived things [as with the language of demons]- see on 2:1.

Was furious- An example of where the Bible teaches us basic human psychology. He felt mocked by the wise men, although actually they hadn't mocked him, he just perceived it that way- and so he took out his anger against them on the babies of Bethlehem. He transferred his anger from one to another. And that explains why the woman behind the till was so angry with you for no reason this morning- because she was transferring onto you the anger she felt against her mother / partner / neighbour arising from an incident [probably a misunderstanding and wrong imputation of motives] which happened last night.

And sent out soldiers and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem and in all the borders of it aged two years and under, according to the time which he had determined from the Magi- This would suggest that when he asked them when the star had first appeared, they replied 'about two years ago'. It would seem they had been planning their journey, or perhaps even making it, for two years.

2:17 *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying*- Be aware that when it comes to *prophecy*, in the sense of foretelling future events, the New Testament sometimes seems to quote the Old Testament *without* attention to the context- at least, so far as human Bible scholarship can discern. The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot

fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfilment outside that which the context seems to require.

2:18 *A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children*- But the focus of the massacre was Bethlehem. Clearly a reference to one event is being applied to another, and this is how Matthew understood the 'fulfilment' of prophecy.

And she would not be comforted, because they are not- The words are used about Rachel's husband Jacob weeping for Joseph, a clear type of the Lord, and refusing to be comforted because he 'was not' [Gen. 37:35- cp. the brothers' explanation about Joseph's supposed death, that "one is not", Gen. 42:13]. This again is rather out of strict context because Rachel died before Joseph's supposed death (Gen. 35:19). The literary argument seems to be that *if* she had then been alive, *then* she would have wept as Jacob wept for her son Joseph. Jacob's weeping [on behalf of Rachel] for the death of Joseph / Jesus was ultimately misplaced because Joseph was safe in Egypt. And so the weeping of 'Rachel' for the Bethlehem babies was done whilst Jesus was in fact safe in Egypt. This could explain the semantic link between the quotation of 'Out of Egypt have I called My Son' and then this quotation about Rachel weeping as Jacob wept for Joseph, when in fact he was safe in Egypt. Jer. 31:15,16 reports Rachel weeping for her children who had been lost, and then being told to stop crying because they would come again from the Gentile land where they had been taken. In other words, she was being told that the children she thought were dead and gone were actually alive- in a Gentile land. Which was exactly the case with Jacob's mourning for Joseph which is clearly the basis for the mourning of 'Rachel' here. But then the problem is that the women this verse is applied to in Matthew 2 had lost actual children by real physical death. It's all a very complicated argument, and very forced and unsatisfactory to Western eyes and ears because the context appears to always be so inappropriate and the facts don't quite fit. Only parts of the picture fit. But this is very much the style of Jewish *midrash* [commentary] on the Old Testament. It probably would've been more persuasive, interesting and intriguing to first century Jewish ears than it is to ours in the 21st Century.

2:19 *But when Herod was dead, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream*

to Joseph in Egypt, saying- Literally, "appears", not 'appeared'. The inconsistent use of tenses isn't the grammatical mistake of an uneducated, uninspired writer. This device is common in the Gospels. It focuses attention upon the Angel appearing, and encourages us to re-live the moment, as if to say, 'And wow, lo and behold- an Angel appears!'. The Gospels were initially intended for public reading, even performance on street corners, as the majority of people in the first century world were illiterate. So this kind of device is just what we would expect.

2:20 *Arise and take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead that sought the young child's life*- Herod was not alone in wanting Jesus dead. The "they" presumably referred to the Jerusalem leadership of 2:3 [see note there].

2:21 *And he arose and took the young child and his mother and came into the land of Israel*- Again we note his immediate obedience. International migration was a major thing in those days, when people rarely travelled more than 50 km. from their birthplace let alone moved that far.

2:22 *But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he withdrew into the region of Galilee*- The implication could be that Joseph had no other information apart that from Herod had died, but on crossing the border, he learnt that Herod's son was reigning- and Joseph feared to go further. Therefore, so I read the record, God made a concession to Joseph's weakness and told him to go to the backwater of Galilee. He "turned aside" into Galilee suggests in the Greek that he 'withdrew himself', as if pulling back into obscurity. The same Greek word is found in Mt. 12:15: "Jesus withdrew himself from there". He likewise "withdrew into a desert place" (Mt. 14:13), "withdrew [from the crowds]" (Mk. 3:7), "withdrew" when the crowds wanted to crown Him King (Jn. 6:15), judges "withdrew" and talked privately amongst themselves (Acts 26:31). So the picture seems to be that God intended Joseph to raise Jesus somewhere other than Galilee, perhaps in Bethlehem or Jerusalem. But Joseph feared Archelaus, and therefore he was given a 'plan B', to withdraw and fade away into the obscurity of Nazareth. But in God's perfect way, the upbringing in Nazareth could also fulfil His plans and this explains the otherwise rather forced interpretation that Jesus lived in Nazareth so that He would be a 'Nazarene' (see on 2:23). God works oftentimes with us in the same way. He makes concessions to our weaknesses, and whilst the plan Bs, Cs and Ds don't fit as snugly into His prophetic intentions as plan A might have done- they still fit. Because He makes them fit. And that in my opinion explains the slight sense we get in some parts of the record here that events are being 'made to fit' Bible prophecies. And we see it in our own lives. We may take a plan C or D, e.g. a sister may marry an unbeliever, and this doesn't mean that God's

purpose with her finishes, but rather that [e.g.] Bible teaching about marriage just doesn't fit as snugly to her experience as it might have done otherwise.

2:23 *And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth. That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophets*- It was not specifically spoken by plural prophets that Messiah was to be called "a Nazarene" because He would grow up in despised Nazareth, but that was the implication of the prophecies that Messiah was to be despised of men. See on 2:22 for some thoughts about this apparent 'forcing' of the prophetic fulfilment here.

That he should be called a Nazarene - The town was despised spiritually as incapable of producing a prophet (Jn. 1:46; 7:52), and yet in Hebrew it meant 'town of the shoot', and the shoot was a title of Messiah (Is. 11:1). Again this is typical of God's style- to invest the most spiritually despised with the highest spiritual calling.

CHAPTER 3

3:1 *And in those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying*- Presumably this connects with 2:23, meaning that whilst the Lord was still living in Nazareth, John began preaching. One wonders whether John maybe began his ministry up to three and a half years before the baptism of Jesus, seeing his work was typical of the three and a half year Elijah ministry preparing for the *second* coming of the Lord Jesus.

3:2 *Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand*- There has always been the rulership of God over the individuals whose hearts accept His Kingship. But through the work of the Lord Jesus, this rulership was made so much greater, and His example, teaching and spirit enabled believers to come more totally within that rulership. But clearly the Kingdom was "at hand" not in the sense of its literal establishment on earth physically, but in that as King of the Kingdom, the Lord Jesus could rightly have "the Kingdom of Heaven" as a title.

It appears that Matthew under inspiration expressed the Gospel in terms which were attractive and not unduly provocative to his hearers, hence he uses 'Heaven' for 'God' as was common Jewish practice. We too should present the Gospel with the same kind of forethought to the sensitivities and nature of our audience, rather than baldly present 'truth' to them considering that we have thereby done our duty. We are not seeking to merely fulfil a duty, but to actually "so speak" that we convert men and women.

A possibility is that the Kingdom of God / Heaven could have come soon at that time ["at hand"] *if* Israel had repented. Then they would not have killed their Messiah and King but rather accepted Him. Whilst God's purpose was not ultimately thwarted by Israel's rejection of the Lord Jesus and their impenitence, the Divine project would have taken a different form if they had repented and accepted Him. We note that those who responded to John's call to repentance were again asked to "Repent" by the Lord (Mt. 4:17). Their repentance was therefore only surface level. The Lord cursed the fig tree (cp. Israel) because they had only leaves, an appearance of repentance and spiritual fruit in responding to John's message, but actually there was not even the first sign of real fruit on that tree when it was really analysed. The Lord describes John as mourning to his audience, and them *not* mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32). They rejoiced in the idea of repentance, but never really got down to it.

3:3 *For this is he*- Is this part of John's message about *Jesus*? Or is this a note from Matthew about *John* being the voice in the wilderness? The other Gospel writers use the Isaiah quotation as if it is their comment on

John (Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4). The present tense 'this is he' can be understood as part of the dramatic present tense style of some parts of the Gospels [see on 2:19]. The way Mt. 3:4 continues "And this same John..." might suggest that "This is he" is also Matthew's comment about John.

The voice of one crying- When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice" (Lk. 3:7). He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. In this context it's worth reconsidering Lk. 3:7: "Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?". John said these words to those who were coming to him wishing to be baptized by him- exactly because he had warned them of the wrath to come. It's possible that John meant this as a rhetorical reflection, thus enabling us to paraphrase him something like this: 'And what kind of man am I, who am I, just another sinful guy like you, who has warned you to flee? I'm nothing- don't get baptized because of me, but because you repent and are committed to bringing forth the fruits of repentance". And it's worth meditating that if Israel had responded to his preaching, then the glorious salvation of God might have even then been revealed in the form of the Kingdom coming on earth, even then. But instead of heeding John's message, Israel in the end crucified their King, necessitating a latter day John the Baptist mission (Mt. 11:13,14; 17:11,12). And it's not going too far to suggest that our latter day witness to Israel and indeed to the world is to conducted in the spirit of John's preaching; hence the crucial importance of understanding the spirit and content of his witness.

In the wilderness- John the Baptist prepared a highway in the desert through baptizing repentant people (Mk. 1:3,4). This highway was to be a path *to* Christ as well as the one He would travel. Those converted became a path to Christ for others. One purpose of our calling to the Gospel is to assist others onto that same way. And it's worth reflecting that Christ can only come once the way for Him is prepared- as if His coming depends upon a certain level of response to our preaching, especially to the Jews of the very last days.

Make ready the way of the Lord- The quotation from Isaiah suggests that if the way was prepared by human repentance, then this would be the path over which the Lord's glory would return to Zion in the establishment of the Kingdom. See on 3:2 *repent*. The strong suggestion is that the

Lord's coming in glory was a possibility if Israel had repented at John's preaching and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Lk. 3:6 goes on to say that if they had repented, then the prophecy that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" would come true- and that is clearly language of the future Kingdom of God on earth. For not even all Israel saw / perceived the Jesus / salvation of God, let alone "all flesh". The term "all flesh" is used frequently in the OT about mankind generally rather than just Israel; indeed it is used in contradistinction to Israel (Dt. 5:26; Job 34:15; Is. 49:26; Is. 66:16,23,24; Jer. 25:31; Dan. 4:12).

Make His paths straight- The implication is that the repentance of people in Judah would make straight the Lord's path over which He would travel. Repentant people are therefore His way to Jerusalem. This of itself suggests that the Lord shall only come to Zion once there is repentance in Israel, seeing repentant people are the way or road which enables Him to travel. The allusion is clearly to the practice of preparing the road for an important person to travel upon. The whole metaphor suggests that Christ will only come to Zion once His people are spiritually ready, once there is repentance, perhaps specifically in Israel. John the Baptist was to prepare the Lord's way (Lk. 1:76 same Greek words). But it was repentant people who were to prepare the Lord's way. John's appeal was for others to prepare the Lord's way by repentance. But his preaching meant that he was the one preparing the way; the change of life in his hearers would therefore as it were be counted to John. The work of preparing the Lord's way is mentioned in Mal. 3:1 as being the work of "the messenger"; and the context appears to be the restoration from Babylon. Perhaps because those addressed in Is. 40:1 ("Prepare *ye*") failed in their task and God sought to see it fulfilled through a specific messenger.

The ideas of fleeing wrath (Lk. 3:7) and preparing a way are surely based upon the Law's command in Dt. 19:3 that a way or road should be prepared to the city of refuge (symbolic of Christ- Heb. 6:18), along which the person under the death sentence for manslaughter could flee for refuge. John was preparing that way or road to Christ, and urging ordinary people to flee along it. They didn't like to think they were under a death sentence for murder. They were just ordinary folk like the soldiers who grumbled about their wages, and the publicans who were a bit less than honest at work. But they had to flee. But they wouldn't be alone in that. If a man prepares his way after God's principles (2 Chron. 27:6; Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way of escape.
His paths straight- There is a definite allusion to the language here in Acts 13:10, where a man is accused by Paul of perverting "the right [s.w. 'straight'] ways of the Lord". Paul clearly saw *his* mission as likewise to

prepare straight paths for the Lord Jesus by preaching the Gospel of transformation. The implication could be that John's mission ultimately failed, in that the Lord Jesus did not come to Zion in glory. Paul seems to imply that therefore that work is now placed upon all Christian preachers; we are to prepare the way so that the Lord can come to Zion and establish God's Kingdom. When we read that Paul instructed men "in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25) we have the same idea- we are preparing the way of the Lord Jesus. Each person who is truly converted is part of the Lord's highway, and once there is sufficient transformation of human life, the way will be ready enough for the Lord to return upon it.

Just as the preaching of the Gospel was to make straight paths for the Messiah to come (Lk. 3:4), so we are to make *our* paths straight (Heb. 12:13)- as if somehow we are the Lord Jesus; His revelation to this world at the second coming will in a sense be our revelation. Hence the final visions of Revelation speak of the Lord's second coming in terms which are applicable to the community of those in Him [e.g. a city of people coming down from Heaven to earth]. John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways. Thus Is. 40:3, which is being quoted in Lk. 3:4, speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the Lord*", whereas Is. 62:10 speaks of "Prepare ye the way *of the people*". Yet tragically, the way / path of Israel was not the way / path of the Lord (Ez. 18:25).

There was an intensity and critical urgency about John and his message. John urged people to make their path "straight"- using a Greek word elsewhere translated "immediately", "forthwith" (Lk. 3:4 s.w. Mk. 1:12,28 and often). Getting things straight in our lives is a question of immediate response. He warns people to "flee from the wrath to come" (Lk. 3:7). This was what their changed lives and baptisms were to be about- a fleeing from the wrath to come. He speaks as if that "wrath to come" is just about to come, it's staring them in the face like a wall of forest fire, and they are to flee away from it. And yet Paul (in one of his many allusions to John's message, which perhaps he had heard himself 'live') speaks of "the wrath to come" as being the wrath of the final judgment (1 Thess. 1:10), or possibly that of AD70 (1 Thess. 2:16). But both those events would not have come upon the majority of John's audience. And

the day of 'wrath to come' is clearly ultimately to be at the Lord's return (Rev. 6:17; 11:18). Yet John zooms his hearers forward in time, to perceive that they face condemnation and judgment day right now, as they hear the call of the Gospel. This was a feature of John; he had the faith which sees things which are not as though they already are. Thus he looked at Jesus walking towards him and commented that here was the "Lamb of God", a phrase the Jews would've understood as referring to the lamb which was about to be sacrificed on Passover (Jn. 1:29). John presumably was referencing the description of the crucified Jesus in Is. 53:7; for John, he foresaw it all, it was as if he saw Jesus as already being led out to die, even though that event was over three years distant. And so he could appeal to his audience to face judgment day as if they were standing there already. We need to have the same perspective.

John the Baptist's ministry was so that the 'crooked' nation of Israel should be 'made straight' and ready to accept Jesus as Messiah (Lk. 3:5). God's enabling power was present so that this might have happened; but the same word is used in Acts 2:40 and Phil. 2:15 to describe Israel as still being a 'crooked' nation. John's preaching, like ours, was potentially able to bring about the conversion of an entire nation. So instead of being discouraged by the lack of response to our witness, let's remember the enormous potential power which there is behind it. Every word, witness of any kind, tract left lying on a seat... has such huge potential conversion power lodged within it, a power from God Himself. John's mission was to prepare Israel for Christ, to figuratively '*bring low*' the hills and mountains, the proud Jews of first century Israel, and raise the valleys, i.e. inspire the humble with the real possibility of salvation in Christ (Lk. 3:5). Paul uses the same Greek word for "bring low" no fewer than three times, concerning how the Gospel has humbled him (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 11:7; Phil. 4:12). It's as if he's saying: 'John's preaching did finally have its' effect upon me; it did finally make me humble enough for the Lord Jesus'. And as John made straight paths for men's feet that they might come unto Christ (Mt. 3:3), so did Paul (Heb. 12:13). There was another reason behind John's appeal for repentance. It was that he perceived how eager God is to forgive, and how our acceptance of that forgiveness is His glory and His salvation. John says, quoting Is. 40:5, that if men repent and ready themselves for the Lord's coming, then "all flesh shall see the salvation of God". But he is changing the quotation- Isaiah said that all flesh shall see the glory of God. But saving men and women is the thing God glories in.

3:4 *Now John wore a garment*- Lit. 'Had his clothing'. The Greek *ekho* translated "had" is also translated 'conceive', 'count' and 'take for'. He took himself as Elijah. Clearly John was consciously presenting himself as the Elijah prophet by the way he dressed. He had to make

some personal effort to fulfil the prophecies about him. Even if a calling is intended for us by God, we still have to make conscious effort to fulfil it. We can easily overestimate the amount and frequency of Divine contact with Bible characters. It was not so much that John was told 'You are to be the Elijah prophet, now you must dress, act and speak like him!'. The choice of dress, appearance and even location in the wilderness were all probably John's own conscious attempts to be like Elijah, without being specifically asked. We too are set up with Bible characters whom we are asked to follow in essence- for this is why so much of God's word is really history. And there are ways in which the initiative is left with us as to how and how far we follow them.

Of camel's hair and a leather girdle about his loins- This was not the clothing of the poor- their garments were typically made of goat's hair. Indeed, camel's hair coats were a luxury. We therefore conclude that John was consciously modelling himself on Elijah, who had dressed like this (2 Kings 1:8).

And his food was locusts and wild honey- Not necessarily from bees, but perhaps tree gum e.g. from the tamarisk tree.

3:5 *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him*- These global terms such as 'all Judaea' clearly aren't literal- people from all Judaea went out to John. Perhaps John set up his place of witness as he did so that those interested had to make some effort to come out to him for baptism, considering that candidates had to make some effort and show some commitment. On the other hand, if he wanted to reach as many people as possible, surely he could've set up his place of preaching and baptism in the city and thereby attracted and saved more people. For not everyone was able to make the long journey down to Jordan and back. One wonders whether he made the same mistake as the historical Elijah, in having too low a view of others. Whatever, his hard hitting message attracted people, so much so that the city dwellers streamed out to him, motivated by the testimony of the others who had been there and returned to share the good news of sin confessed and forgiven and of the coming of the Christ.

3:6 *And they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins*- As if they confessed their sins whilst in the water and the baptism process was ongoing. *Exomologeho* essentially means to agree with, hence the same word is used about 'confessing' in the sense of praising (s.w. Mt. 11:25, Rom. 15:9). To repent, to confess sin, is essentially to agree with God's perspective on our sins. They agreed that they were sinners. Elsewhere, what they did is described as 'the baptism of

repentance', of *metanoia* (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Acts 13:24; 19:4). *Metanoia* strictly means to think again, or legally, a reversal of a legal decision. The legal connotations of the language are developed further in Romans 1-8, which expounds the Gospel in terms of the court room. I have suggested elsewhere that Paul may have heard John preaching, for all Jerusalem went to hear his message, including "many of the Pharisees" (:7), and Paul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time. This would explain his many allusions to John's teaching, and it could be that the whole legal approach of Romans 1-8 is based upon this language of charge, agreement with the charge and re-thinking of the human case which we meet here, right at the start of the NT Gospel story (see on 3:7 *The wrath to come* to see how Romans uses John's term 10 times). The decision that we are condemned must be agreed with by us, whereas previously we had not agreed with it- considering us to be not that bad as people, victims of circumstance etc. Our re-thinking leads to God's re-thinking and reversal of the judgment against us. Note that the whole sense of the Greek words for 'confessing' and 'repenting' is internal to the human mind. Practical change is not of itself implied in the words. This of course comes as a result of a genuine agreement with the charge of sin and a radical re-thinking. It is not therefore for us to demand repentance from others in terms of external appearance. We cannot judge the secrets of the heart, and are to accept repentance as claimed, seeing that it is a deeply personal and internal affair.

3:7 *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them*- Lk. 3:12 records how there "came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?". There is a parallel between desiring baptism and realizing that they must *do* something concretely in their lives. The baptism process brings us into the realm of God's gracious forgiveness and redemption, and into living contact with the real Christ. There is no way we can be passive to this and do nothing about it. Note that Matthew himself was a publican- this is an example of the Gospel records being a transcript of the message standardly taught by e.g. Matthew.

You offspring of vipers- This intense, urgent presentation of the ultimate issues of life and death, acceptance and rejection, brought forth a massive response. People lined up for baptism. And John was hardly polite. He called his baptismal candidates a “generation of vipers”, alluding obviously to the seed of the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Yet his tough line with them, his convicting them of sin, led them to ask what precisely they must do, in order to be baptized. They didn’t turn away in offence. They somehow sensed he was for real, and the message he preached couldn’t be ignored or shrugged off as the ravings of a fanatic. Time and again we see the same- the very height of the demand of Christ of itself

convicts men and women of Him. And it's for this reason that it seems almost 'easier' to convict people of Christ and the need for baptism into Him in societies [e.g. radical Moslem ones] where the price for conversion to Him is death or serious persecution… than in the easy going Western countries where being 'Christian' is the normal cultural thing to do. The Gospel was presented in different forms by the early preachers, according to their audience. John the Baptist set the pattern in this. Having quoted the prophecy about the need for the rough to be made smooth and the proud to be humbled in order for them to accept Jesus, John "said *therefore* to the multitude… ye offspring of vipers" (Lk. 3:7 RV). He used tough and startling language because that was what the audience required. He had set his aims- to humble the proud. And so he used "therefore" appropriate approaches. The early preachers as Paul became all things to all men, so that they might win some. They therefore consciously matched their presentation and *how* they articulated the same basic truths to their audience. But perhaps even his comment "Generation of vipers" was said with a heart of love and appeal, reflecting the "heart of mercy" which he had come to know in the Father. He was "the friend of the bridegroom" (Jn. 3:29)- the one who introduced the groom to the bride and arranged the marriage and then the wedding. John's "Generation of vipers" stuff was all part of his attempt to persuade the bride, Israel, to accept the groom, the Lord Jesus. He wasn't angrily moralizing, lashing out at society as many a dysfunctional preacher does today, working out his own anger by criticizing and condemning society in the name of God. No, John was appealing. He had an agenda and an aim- to bring Israel and the Son of God together in marriage.

Who warned you- The Greek means to exemplify, to 'exhibit under the eyes', and can imply that John had himself shown them the way of repentance by having done so himself. John the Baptist rhetorically asked his hearers: "Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Mt. 3:7). The answer, of course, was 'Well, you, John'. And John continues: "Bring forth *therefore* [i.e., because I am the one who taught you] fruits meet for repentance". John recognizes that his converts will be after his image in one sense; as Paul put it, what his hearers had heard and seen in him as he preached, they were to do. So I suggest the emphasis should be on the word 'who', rather than on the word 'you'. The sense is not 'You lot of sinners? Ha! And where did you lot hear of the need for repentance!'. Rather is it a rhetorical question. Who warned them to flee from the wrath to come? John himself. Here we see another window onto the humility of John in his appeal. He is saying that he too has confessed and repented of his sins, and he knew this was witnessed in his life. And he asks the legalistic Pharisees to follow his example. John was asking them to repent of their legalism and accept Jesus as Messiah, and it would seem that John had had to pass through that very same path himself, freeing himself from the Essene's legalism which it seems he had

got associated with. And Elijah, John's role model, was another man who was led to repent of exclusivism and legalism. The point is clinched by a look at the Greek word translated 'warned'. It literally means to exhibit, to exemplify. John was the pattern for them. And if Paul was indeed amongst that crowd of cynical Pharisees, Paul was ultimately John's most stellar convert, although little did he realize it at the time. The same can happen with our preaching. We may make converts years after our death. And the lesson comes home clearly, that the preacher or the teacher is to be the living embodiment of his or her message, the word being preached made flesh in the preacher.

To flee from the anger to come- A common idea of Paul's especially in his letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:18; 2:5,8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22;12:19; 13:4,5). 1 Thess. 2:16 surely alludes here in speaking of how the wrath has come upon the orthodox Jews. See on 3:6. In Mt. 23:33 Jesus seems to say that it is now impossible for that group to flee the coming wrath. Even in this life the frame of opportunity can come to an end before death.

Paul alluded to some parts of the Gospels much more than others. An example of this is the way in which he alluded so extensively to the passages related to John the Baptist. I would suggest that the reason for this is that he saw John as somehow his hero, one for whom he had a deep respect. In doing so he was sharing the estimation of his Lord, who also saw John as one of the greatest believers. There are many 'unconscious' links between Paul's writings and the records of John, indicating how deeply the example and words of John were in Paul's mind (e.g. Mt. 3:7 = 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Jn. 3:31 = 1 Cor. 15:47). Or consider how John said that wicked Jewry would be "hewn down" (Mt. 3:10); Paul uses the very same word to describe how the Jewish branches had now been "cut off" (Rom. 11:22,24). Paul saw himself as being like the best man, who had betrothed the believers to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2,3)- just as John had described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (Jn. 3:28). Or again, reflect how Paul's mention of John in Acts 13:24,25 apparently adds nothing to his argument; it seems out of context. But it surely indicates the degree to which John was never far below the surface in Paul's thinking.

3:8 *Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance*- It seems likely that Paul went to hear John the Baptist preach; "there went out to him all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem" (Mk. 1:5), and at this time Paul was living in Jerusalem. I believe Paul heard John and was convicted by him of Christ. John preached the need to "bring forth fruits meet unto repentance" (Mt. 3:8); and Paul made those his own watchwords in his world-wide preaching (Acts 26:20)- Paul describes his preaching in

language which is directly alluding to how John preached. As John said that he was *sent* to baptize, but especially to witness of Christ (Jn. 1:33), so Paul felt that he too was *sent to baptize*, but his emphasis was more on the preaching of Christ than physically baptizing (1 Cor. 1:17).

"Bring forth therefore fruit worthy of repentance" must be connected with our Lord's description of the Gentile believers as "a nation bringing forth the (vineyard) fruits" of the Kingdom (Mt. 21:43). These are defined in Rom. 14:17: "The Kingdom of God is... righteousness, and peace, and joy". Christ's parable of the vine in Jn. 15 explains that it is the word abiding in us which brings forth fruit. Bringing forth fruit is therefore a way of life (cp. Rom. 6:21,22). In each aspect in which we 'bear fruit', we have in a sense 'repented'. Our repentance and fruit-bearing is not something which we can set time limits on within this life. Christ would have been satisfied if Israel had borne at least some immature fruit (Lk. 13:7). Only when there is no fruit at all, in any aspect of spiritual life, will Christ reject us. Some will bear more fruit than others- some sixty, some an hundredfold. Mt. 3:8 connects repentance with fruit bearing. This shows that God may recognize *degrees* of repentance and response to His word, as He recognizes degrees of fruit bearing. It is far too simplistic for us to label some of our brethren as having repented and others as being totally unrepentant. In any case, the fruits of repentance are brought forth unto *God*, not necessarily to fellow believers (Rom. 7:4). There is a marked dearth of evidence to show that a believer must prove his repentance in outward terms before his brethren can accept him. The "fruits" John had in mind are made more explicit in Luke 3. In order to prepare the way of the Lord, to make a level passage for Him, the man with two coats should give to him who had none, and likewise share his food (Lk. 3:11). So the 'equality' and levelling was to be one of practical care for others. We have to ask, how often we have shared our food, clothing or money with those who don't have… for this is all part of preparing for the Lord's coming. It could even be that when there is more of what Paul calls "an equality" amongst the community of believers, that then the way of the Lord will have been prepared. And He will then return.

And yet despite the demand for "fruit", John the Baptist showed a spirit of concession to human weakness in his preaching. He told the publicans: "Extort no more than that which is appointed you" (Lk. 3:13 RV). He tacitly accepted that these men would be into extortion. But within limits, he let it go. Likewise he told soldiers to be content with their wages- not to quit the job. And seeing there were no Roman Legions in Judaea at his time [Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1], these were likely Jewish soldiers. He didn't tell them to quit their jobs, but to live with integrity within those jobs. He told the soldiers to be content with their wages- implying he

expected them to not throw in their job. This is juxtaposed with the command for them to do no violence. But not grumbling about wages was as fundamental an issue for John as not doing physical violence to people. To have as Paul put it "Godliness with contentment" [another of his allusions to John's preaching?] is as important as not doing violence. And yet our tendency is to think that moaning about our wages is a perfectly normal and acceptable thing to do, whereas violence is of an altogether different order. It's like Paul hitting the Corinthians for their divisiveness, when if we'd been writing to them we would likely have focused upon their immorality and false doctrine. John would have been far less demanding had he simply told the publicans and soldiers to quit their jobs. By asking them to continue, and yet to live out their lives within those jobs with Godly principles, He was being far more demanding. John places complaining about wages [a common human fault] in juxtaposition with doing violence to others (Lk. 3:14)- to show that in his serious call to a devout and holy life, there are no such things as little sins. Ez. 16:49,50 defines the sins of Sodom as including "pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor… they were haughty, and committed abomination". The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started- with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The Anglo-Saxon worldview has taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church. But is this really right…?

3:9 *And think not to say within yourselves*- Always the Biblical emphasis is upon internal thought processes and the need to be aware of them. John's great convert Paul several times uses the same device in his letters- foreseeing the likely thought process in response to his message, and answering it ahead of time (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:35).

We have Abraham as our father, for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham- Said perhaps pointing to the stones. Perhaps they were the 12 stones set up after the Jordan crossing (Josh. 3 and 4). There is a word play between *avanim*, stones, and *banim,* sons. *Avanim*, stones, in turn sounds like *evyonim*, the term for the poor, the social outcasts- these were the "stones" which were being accepted into the covenant of grace.

3:10 *And even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*- John's words about cutting down the fruitless tree are directly quoted by the Lord Jesus in Mt. 7:17-19; 12:33- as if to show His solidarity with John's teaching. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had heard these very words being preached by John when He went to be baptized by him. "Now [also]", right now; John felt that the day of Christ's judgment was very close. The language of gathering grain into the barn and burning the chaff is used by the Lord concerning the future judgment at His second coming (Mt. 13:30). John saw the Lord Jesus as already having the winnowing fork in His hand (:13), meaning that in essence, judgment began with the ministry of Jesus. In essence, we stand before His judgment right now. Judgment day is not some unknown future entity which has no connection with this life.

3:11 *I indeed baptize you in water to repentance, but he that comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry. He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire*- Christ "shall baptize *you*" plural was deeply meditated upon by Paul, until he came to see in the fact that we *plural* are baptized the strong implication that therefore we should be one body, without unnecessary divisions (= 1 Cor. 12:13).

John prophesied that the disciples would be baptized with fire (Mt 3:11); this was fulfilled by tongues of Spirit descending which looked like fire (Acts 2:3). Evidently this was not literal fire or else it would not have rested on the heads of the disciples. So the words of Matthew 3:11 spoke of how things would *appear* to the disciples, without saying so explicitly.

John described himself as a preacher of Christ who was not "worthy" to do so. The same Greek word is used by Paul when he says he is "not *meet* (s.w.) to be called an apostle" (1 Cor. 15:9); and that it was God's grace alone that had made him an "*able* (s.w. "worthy") minister of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 13:6). He knew that his "*sufficiency*" (s.w. "worthy") to give knowledge of salvation (John language- Lk. 1:77), to be a preacher, was from God alone (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5); and that in fact this was true of *all* preachers. But do we really feel like this in our preaching? John was a burning and shining light to the world (Jn. 5:35), just as we should be (Phil. 2:15). And therefore, if we are to witness as John did, we need to have the humility of John in our preaching. He was 'in the Truth' from a baby, he lived a spiritual, self-controlled life. And yet he had this great sense of personal sinfulness and unworthiness as a preacher. It's difficult for those raised Christian to have the sense of sinfulness which Paul had, and thereby to have his zeal for preaching. But actually his zeal

was a reflection of John's; and John was a 'good boy', brought up in the Faith. Yet he had a burning sense of his spiritual inadequacy. Anglo-Saxon Christianity urgently needs to capture his spirit. Truly Paul 'bore' Christ to the world just as John 'bore' (s.w.) Christ's Gospel (Acts 9:15 = Mt. 3:11). If ever a man was hard on himself, it was John the Baptist. His comment on his preaching of Christ was that he was not worthy (RVmg. 'sufficient') to bear Christ's sandals (Mt. 3:11). The sandal-bearer was the herald; John knew he was heralding Christ's appearing, but he openly said he was not worthy to do this. He felt his insufficiency, as we ought to ours. Would we had that depth of awareness; for on the brink of the Lord's coming, we are in a remarkably similar position to John. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the savour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). To carry the master's sandals (Mt. 3:11) was, according to Vine, the work of the lowest slave. This was how John saw himself; and this is what witnessing for Jesus is all about, being the lowest slave and servant of the Lord of glory. It's interesting in this context to note how the Lord Jesus states that in some sense, John 'was Elijah', whereas he himself denies this (Mt. 11:14; 17:12; Mk. 9:13). Such was his humility.

For baptizing in water unto repentance, see note on Mt. 3:3 above. Given that Isaiah 40 offered forgiveness in order to provoke repentance, it could be that the AV translation is correct- although *eis* ["unto"] has a very wide range of meaning. John baptized in order to lead people to repentance, rather than baptizing only those who had repented and got their lives in order. Even the NET Bible's "baptize... for repentance" could be read the same way- baptism was for the end of provoking repentance, rather than being baptism only for the visibly repentant. This likelihood is strengthened once we realize that there is surely an allusion here to Wisdom 11:23: "You overlook the sins of men, unto repentance". Repentance in any case is an internal attitude (see on 3:6), and John as he stood in the Jordan River was totally incapable of judging whether or not in practice his hearers had actually changed their lives. He baptized them because they had confessed their sins and re-thought, re-pented. Not because they had actually changed in practical, ongoing lifestyle issues. Likewise the apostles who baptized 3000 people in Acts 2 had no way of measuring repentance in practice. Mk. 1:15 records John's message as being: "Repent ye and believe the Gospel". This might seem to be in the wrong order- for we have come to think that surely belief of the Gospel comes before repentance. And so it does very often- but there is another option here- that the repentance is ongoing. Life after conversion is a life of believing the basic Gospel which led us to conversion and repentance in the first place.

”He shall baptize you" points up the contrast is between John baptizing unto repentance, and Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit. The contrast is between 'repentance' and 'the Holy Spirit'. I suggest that the idea is that the gift of the Holy Spirit would empower repentance and new-mindedness far more than what was achieved by unaided, steel-willed human repentance.

3:12 *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor and he will gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire*- "He (Jesus) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit (even) with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and... he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). John put a choice before them: fire, or fire. Either we are consumed with the fire of devotion to God, or we face the figurative fire of condemnation. This is the logic of judgment. John says that the axe is laid to the root of the trees; his hearers were about to be cut down and thrown into the fire of condemnation. And He says that the Jesus whom he heralds is about to come and divide the wheat from the chaff in judgment, gathering in the wheat, and burning the chaff with “unquenchable fire” (Lk. 3:17). But the ‘fire’ of condemnation and the division of wheat and chaff is to be done ultimately at the Lord’s second coming (Mt. 13:30; Mk. 9:48). But for John, the moment his audience met Jesus, they were standing before the Lord of judgment, the Judge of all the earth. In their response to Him, they were living out the final judgment. And this is just as true of us, both as preachers and hearers of the Gospel. The message that the Lord will "burn with unquenchable fire" those who reject Him is described as preaching "good tidings unto the people" (Lk. 3:18 RV). Likewise the stark teaching about the mortality of man in Is. 40 is quoted in 1 Pet. as being the Gospel. The harder side of God is in fact the good news for those who reflect deeply upon the essential message and nature of the Almighty. In Jer. 26:2, Jeremiah is warned to “diminish not a word, if so be…” Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn’t have any chance of eliciting a response.

3:13 *Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan, to John, to be baptized by him*- John's ministry was known throughout the Lord; perhaps the Lord travelled with others, some who would later become His disciples; this of itself was an act of identity with the humanity of first century Palestine.

3:14 *But John would have stopped him, saying: I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?*- There had clearly been contact between the Lord and John; John had not literally remained his whole life in the wilderness. Or if he did, then the Lord had travelled out there to meet

him. His limited contact with the Lord had persuaded him that He was Messiah; for he wanted the Lord to baptize him. Baptism was something which it was expected would be done either by the Elijah prophet or Messiah (Jn. 1:25).

3:15 *But Jesus answering said to him*- The sensitivity of the Lord is reflected in how He frequently sensed and foresaw human behaviour and objections / response to His teaching and actions. You can read the Gospels and search for examples. Here's a classic one: "But John would have hindered [Jesus]… but Jesus answering said…" (Mt. 3:14 RV). Jesus 'answered' John's objection even before John had properly expressed it (see another example of this in Lk. 22:70).

Permit it now, for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he permitted him- Maybe the Lord Jesus felt that this act of total identification with sinners in their need was necessary for Him to achieve perfect / total righteousness. And He needed John's assistance in this- "it becomes *us*". He was baptized in order to be absolutely perfect, and that perfection involved the act of identification with sinners in order to totally identify with them. Perfection will never be achieved by holding aloof from sinners, but rather by identification with them that they might be saved. The reason for Jesus being baptized was surely that He wanted to identify with sinful man, taking His place in the line of mixed up folk waiting on the banks of the Jordan.

3:16 *And Jesus when he was baptized immediately came up out of the water, and the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and coming to rest on him*- Sometimes God indicates from what perspective the record is written; at other times He doesn't. Thus Matthew 3:16 makes it clear that the Lord saw Heaven opened at his baptism, and the Spirit descending like a dove. But Luke 3:21-22 just says that "the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended". Luke doesn't say that this is only what happened from the Lord's perspective. This problem of perspective is at the root of the misunderstanding of the demon language in the Gospels.

"To Him" suggests that only the Lord Jesus saw this, although John too saw the dove descending and heard the voice (Jn. 1:33). But He uses the same language in Jn. 1:51: "Hereafter *you* shall see Heaven open, and the Angels of God... descending", just as He had seen the heavens opened and the dove descending upon Him. His sense was that His experience at baptism was in essence to be that of all in Him. This connection lends weight to the idea that His baptism was an act of identification with us, He shared our experience and we are to share His.

Likewise the Spirit 'lighted' upon Jesus at His baptism, and the only other time we find this idea is when He promised that although we know not from whence the Spirit 'lights' ["comes"], it will indeed 'light' upon every one that is born of water and Spirit (Jn. 3:8). The same term is used in Acts 19:6, where after baptism the Spirit 'lighted upon' those baptized. Thus the believer's baptism is spoken of in terms reminiscent of the Lord's. He was baptized to set us an example, identifying with us in order to appeal for us to likewise identify with Him.

3:17 *And a voice came from the heavens, saying: This is My beloved Son*- Surely an allusion to Gen. 22:2 (LXX), where the sacrificed Isaac was Abraham's beloved son.

In whom I am well pleased- Combining references to Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1. Klausner: "In whom I shall be blessed". Quoted about the Lord also in Mt. 12:18; 17:5. The contrast is with how the Father was not "well pleased" with Israel when they were in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:5); but He was well pleased with His Son in the wilderness. Many prophecies about Israel, the 'servant' of Isaiah's prophecies, come true in Jesus. God's plan in Israel failed due to their disobedience, but the intention behind it came true in Jesus; He was the Son who fulfilled the Father's wishes after Israel failed Him. Jesus thus became the embodiment of Israel; He was their representative before God. It is in this context that the representative nature of the Lord Jesus was first established; He was God's Son who was fully representative of Israel. It is thereby through Him that Israel can be finally restored to their Father.

CHAPTER 4

:1 *Then was Jesus led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil*- The Lord Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing; and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16). Note how Mark speaks of Jesus being 'driven' at this time. Being driven by circumstances can be a form of leading- it just depends which perspective we have.

Commentary on what this passage does *not* mean can be found in my *The Real Devil*.

4:2 *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he hungered*- The only other two men recorded as doing this are Moses and Elijah (Ex. 34:28; 1 Kings 19:8). The Lord chose to seek to enter into their experience; it was presumably His decision to fast for this period. And the Father responded to that by giving Him the encouraging vision of those same two men at the transfiguration. We see here how God is in dialogue with man; if we wish to identify with some Bible character, the Father will respond His side to enable us to do so yet more.

With His familiarity with Scripture, Christ would have seen the similarities between Himself and Elijah, whose morale collapsed after 40 days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19: 8) and Moses, who forfeited his immediate inheritance of the land at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus at the end of 40 days, was in a similar position to them - faced with a real possibility of failure. Moses and Elijah failed because of human weakness - not because of a person called "the devil". It was this same human weakness, the "satan', or adversary, that was tempting Jesus.

The temptations were controlled by God for the Lord's spiritual education. The passages quoted by the Lord to strengthen Himself against His desires ("devil") are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs: -

Deuteronomy 8:2 "The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His	Matthew 4 / Luke 4 "Jesus led up of the spirit" "forty days" "in the wilderness". Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.

commandments (word), or no.”	
Deuteronomy 8:3. “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord...”	“He was afterward an hungered". In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. “He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God”.,
Deuteronomy 8:5 “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee”	Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus- 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89: 32.

Thus the Lord showed us how to read and study the Word - He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel’s experience in the wilderness- they were plagued there by “wild beasts” because of their disobedience (Dt. 32:19-24 and context).

4:3 *And the tempter came and said to him*- Matthew's record speaks of "the tempter", and the suggestion has been made that this was a technical term used to refer to the Essene priest whose duty it was to test the claims to Messiahship made by people (5). This would confirm the suggestion that the Lord's temptations were at the hands of the Jews. The desert where He was would've been accessible from the Qumran settlement of the Essenes, and the preceding chapter 3 of Matthew has recorded how many of these people appear to have accepted baptism from John the Baptist in the very area where the temptations occurred. Perhaps "the tempter" priest stayed around and entered into dialogue with Jesus. In confirmation of the idea that the "devil" was some form of Jewish priestly figure, we note that Mt. 4:4 records that Jesus told him that "It is *written*...". To the illiterate, Jesus usually said that they would have *heard* something *said* in the Old Testament; but to the literate Jewish religious leadership, He prefaces His quotations or allusions by

saying that "It is *written*". The fact He uses this phrase here would suggest He may have been talking to one of that class. The Wisdom of Solomon 2:12-20 has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life and death amongst the Jews, suggesting that they did indeed subject Him to tests of His Messiahship:

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law an accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies*. Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it" (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.).

Every other use of the word "tempter" in Matthew is about the temptation / testing of Jesus by the Jewish leadership (Mt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:18,35); and that very group are presented as the 'satan' or adversary to the Lord Jesus and His work. There is nothing sinful of itself about putting someone to the test. The same word is used about Jesus putting the disciples to the test (Jn. 6:6); Paul tested / put to the test [s.w., A.V. "assayed"] the idea of preaching in Bithynia (Acts 16:7); we are to put ourselves to the test (2 Cor. 13:5); God put Abraham to the test (Heb. 11:17), false apostles were to be put to the test by the faithful (Rev. 2:2). It ought to be clear that there is nothing sinister nor sinful about the idea of being 'put to the test' nor of putting another to the test.

If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread- It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, the Lord responds to the "If you are the Son of *God*..." by quoting Dt. 8:3 "*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. The *if... then* structure here (a 'first class

conditional') effectively means 'Because...' (See Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2012) p. 83). In this case, we are clearly being given an insight into the internal thinking of the Lord Jesus. 'Because You are Son of God, why not...'. A truly human Jesus would inevitably have had such thoughts, and the record here makes that clear. Seeing that Mary appears to have become somewhat influenced by the surrounding view of Jesus as her illegitimate son, it's likely the Lord too had moments when He wondered whether this could all be true- whether He really was God's Son.

Command that these stones become bread- This would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it. But the fact He chose the highest level first of all, meant that He was better able to take the higher level again, and to finally overcome the third temptation, which was definitely a clear choice between right and wrong. More than this, anything other than a desire to make the highest maximum commitment can lead to failure. “The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left” (Ecc. 10:2 NIV) has been understood as referring not so much to right and wrong, good and evil, as to the highest good and lesser good (cp. how the left hand can stand for simply lesser blessing rather than outright evil, e.g. Gen. 48:13-20). The fool inclines to lower commitment. The wise will always incline to the maximum, wholehearted level.

4:4 *But he answered and said: It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*-
The Lord overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and the Lord's experience in the wilderness:

Deuteronomy 8	**Matthew 4**
v. 2 "The Lord thy God [an Angel] led you... in the wilderness"	v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.
Forty years in the wilderness	Forty days in the wilderness

v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered you to hunger".	The Angel made Jesus hunger.
The Angel "fed you with manna" (Ps. 78:25)	Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.
"Man does not live by bread alone"	v. 4 "Man does not live by bread alone"

Thus the Lord Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness "to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2). God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, the Lord's Angel led Him into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since the Lord showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. The Lord was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of the Lord spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, and Israel among others. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e. g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us. Note how the temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple was a temptation to misuse Angelic care. He answered it by a quotation which has an Angelic context: "You (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

4:5 *Then the Devil took him into the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple*- The Greek for "took him" is often used in a non-literal sense, with the idea of receiving someone into an office or situation. The

same word is used in :8 about the Lord being taken up a high mountain. The idea may well be that He was imagining being received into rulership of the Messianic Kingdom, and was wondering whether that would be possible through accepting 'the devil', be it His own flesh or the Jewish system, who humanly speaking seemed able to offer a path to this. Likewise '*set him*' later on in :5 carries the idea of being appointed, established in authority.

The Synoptics speak of how satan 'comes to' and tempts and challenges the Lord Jesus to claim earthly political power, which 'satan' can give him (Mt. 4:8,9). But John describes this in terms of "the people" coming to Him and trying to make Him King- which temptation He refused (Jn. 6:15). Likewise it was 'the devil' in the wilderness who tempted Jesus to make the stones into bread. But in Jn. 6:30,31, it is the Jewish people who offer Him the same temptation. In the wilderness, the Lord responded that man lives by the bread which comes from the mouth of God. In Jn. 6:32, He responds likewise by speaking about "the true bread from heaven". The temptation from 'the devil' to publicly display His Divine powers in front of Israel in the Jerusalem temple (Mt. 4:5,6; Lk. 4:9-12) is repeated by John in terms of the Lord's brothers tempting Him to go up to the same temple and openly validate Himself "to the world" (Jn. 7:1-5).

4:6 *And said to him: If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down. For it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning you, and on their hands they shall carry you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone*- Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen.

The 'devil' of the Lord's own thoughts tempted Him to apply Ps. 91:11 in a wrong context, and jump off the pinnacle of the temple. But if the Lord had gone on, as surely He did, He would have found the words: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet" (Ps. 91:13). This promise would have been of wonderful comfort, as throughout the wilderness temptations the Lord "was with the wild beasts" (Mk. 1:13).

4:7 *Jesus said to him: Again it is written, You shall not make trial of the Lord your God*- The Greek effectively means 'On the other hand, it is also written...'. The Lord Jesus did not try to reconcile the two verses, He

accepted them as part of a dialectic whereby this verse says that but this verse says this- which is typical Hebrew reasoning. Geek reasoning would seek to explain that this verse says this, but that is qualified by this other verse, so the truth is a mixture between the two verses. The Hebrew style of reasoning leaves apparent contradictions to the Western, Greek reasoning mind. But they are not this at all, just dialectical style.

4:8 *Again, the Devil took him to an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them*- The Greek could be translated 'the very highest', clearly a reference to the time of the Kingdom of God on earth. It can hardly be that a fiendish being took the Lord Jesus literally up the highest mountain (Everest) from where He could see all the world. Nor would being up a tall mountain enable the Lord to see "the glory of them". Surely a non-literal event is implied here-within the Lord's mind.

The temptations are hard to take literally:-

- Matthew 4:8 implies that Jesus was led up into a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory, “In a moment of time”. There is no mountain high enough to see all the world. And why would the height of the mountain enable Jesus to see what the world would be like in the future? The earth, being a sphere, there is no point on its surface from which one can see all the parts of the world at one time.

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in a different order. Mark 11:13 says that Jesus was “in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan”, whilst Matthew 4: 2-3 says that “when he had fasted forty days...the tempter (Satan) came to Him...”. Because Scripture cannot contradict itself, we can conclude that these same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. This would fit nicely if these temptations occurred within the mind of Jesus. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus his mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7: 9, and doubtless those images often merged in his tortured mind - although always to be brought into swift control by his recollection of the Word

- Jesus probably told the Gospel writers the record of His temptations, and to bring home in words the intensity of what He underwent, He could have used the figurative approach seen in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.

- It seems unlikely that several times the devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no

record of anything like this happening - presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk (note the devil "led" Jesus there) to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness - He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the devil (he only departed at the end, :11). If Jesus was tempted by the devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.

That the temptations were internal to the mind of Jesus is suggested by the way that in Matthew's record, there is a progression from the desert, to the temple pinnacle, to a high mountain- as if in some sort of ascent toward Heaven. It's even possible that Paul has this in mind when he comments that Jesus did not consider rising up to equality with God a thing to be grasped at, He dismissed that temptation, and instead He progressively *lowered* Himself, even to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6-8).

4:9 *And he said to him: All these things will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me*- The Lord knew full well that "all things", the Kingdom of God when the kingdoms of this world have been subsumed beneath it, could only be given to Him to God. He was tempted to play God, to assume that by His own action He could grasp it for Himself without the cross. It is perhaps to this that Paul alludes when he writes that the Lord did not consider such equality with God a thing to be even grasped after (Phil. 2:6). Again we see how the essence of the wilderness temptations returned to the Lord on the cross. For Phil. 2:6 specifically speaks of the Lord in His time of dying.

4:10 *Then said Jesus to him: Away with you Satan! For it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve*- The record of the Lord's wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the 'devil' / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously against the man of the flesh. Lk. 4:8 records how "Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve". He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh ("mammon" is another personification of the flesh, similar to 'satan'). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master

begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord's example of talking to ourselves, and personalising Scripture as He did? 'You don't want to do *that*! Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that... drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won't try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape'.

4:11 *Then the Devil left him, and angels came and ministered to him*- The same words are used of how they minister to *us* (Heb. 1:14). And the theme of Hebrews 1 and 2 is that the Lord was indeed of our nature, and in essence had the same relationship with us as they had with Jesus.

4:12 *Now when he heard that John was imprisoned*- It's as if the Lord took the end of John's public ministry as the cue to begin His ("from that time…", :17). He may have worked this out from the implication of the prophecies about the Elijah prophet. Or it may be that He took John's imprisonment as the sign to go to Galilee. Whatever, He was acting according to information which came to Him, and structuring His ministry accordingly. We get the impression that this was done without direct commandment from the Father but at His initiative.

He withdrew into Galilee- The Greek definitely implies to withdraw oneself. This seems typical of the Lord during His ministry- to go public for a while and then withdraw.

4:13 *And leaving Nazareth*- Gk. 'to forsake'. Perhaps because of the lack of response already apparent in His home town. Again, as commented on :12, we see the Lord making decisions about His ministry on His initiative in accord with how situations developed.

He went and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali- The idea is of 'to reside'. He changed His base from Nazareth to Capernaum in order to give His message more access to Gentiles.

4:14 *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the*

prophet, saying- This sounds as if the Lord was consciously attempting to fulfil God's word. He was "the word made flesh" but He had to consciously achieve that. See on 3:15.

4:15 *The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles*-"Toward the sea" is "by the way of the sea" (AV). The idea was that John the Baptist was to prepare "the way" for Messiah. Even at this early stage in the ministry, it seems that the Lord recognized that that "way" was going to have to be amongst the Gentiles.

4:16 *The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light*-Each of the Gospels is somehow personalized to the writer. Matthew, for example, changes the Lord's quotation of Is. 9:9 from "the people which *walked* in darkness..." to "the people which *sat* in darkness saw great light" (Mt. 4:16), because he was *sitting* at the receipt of custom when the Lord called him (Mt. 9:9).

And for those dwelling in the region and the shadow of death- As if death is personified, having its own region and shadow. The darkness of the context in Is. 9:2 is that of Is. 8:22- the darkness of condemnation, for the rejected for whom there was 'no dawn' (Is. 8:20 Heb.). We can be condemned in this life and yet still change that verdict- by coming to the light of Christ. Isaiah 8 concluded by speaking of the wicked being sent into the darkness of condemnation (a common figure in Isaiah, e.g. Is. 5:30; 9:19). Those who dwell in the dark shadow of death are therefore those who have been condemned- but for them, the light of Christ arose from despised Galilee and the area around the Sea of Galilee (Is. 9:1- "the sea" surely refers in the context to the Sea of Galilee, not the Mediterranean).

On them a light has dawned- The light is clearly the Lord Jesus. He uses the same word soon afterwards in speaking of how God makes His light to 'spring up' upon both the just and the unjust, the evil and the good (Mt. 5:45). These categories are therefore within the group of those to whom the light of the Gospel has been revealed. Likewise the rising of the sun in the parable of the sower (Mt. 13:6 s.w.) would refer to the beginning of Christ's public ministry; the various types of ground initially responded to John's message, but when Christ's ministry was revealed openly, i.e. the sun sprung up, then persecution began, and they fell away.

4:17 *From that time began Jesus to preach and to say: Repent!*- The Lord's first public word was the challenge to change. His opening words

were surely carefully chosen to verbatim repeat those of John (Mt. 3:2). He wanted to show the continuity of the message from John to Himself. For He was building upon John's work, which had been intended to prepare the way for Him to come triumphantly to Zion over the 'way' which had been prepared in the hearts of repentant people. The exact repetition of John's message could suggest that the Lord saw John's ministry as not having been responded to- and therefore his message and appeal needed repeating.

For the kingdom of heaven is at hand- Gk. 'approaching'. The idea was that John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way, the highway, over which Messiah would come. So now, Messiah was approaching. "The kingdom of God" was a title for Messiah, seeing that He was the King of the Kingdom; and the term is used like that in Scripture too, e.g. Lk. 17:21. The Kingdom could have been then established, the glory of Yahweh could have come to Zion if John's work of preparing the road for it had been successful. But ultimately, Israel would not. But the Greek can also mean that the Kingdom was being 'made near', it was being drawn near by repentance- which is why the Lord was appealing for repentance. This is a significant theme in Bible teaching- that the exact calendar date of the Kingdom's establishment is dependent upon the repentance of Israel. This repentance appears a prerequisite to the Lord's coming in glory and the establishment of the Kingdom. Our focus should therefore be upon appealing to Israel to repent.

4:18 *And walking by the sea of Galilee*- "Walking by" is literally 'around'. The idea could be that He walked all around the lake.

He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen- The Lord's call always comes at the most inconvenient moment. It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, caught in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life. Lk. 5:5 gives more detail. Despite having toiled all night and caught nothing, Peter was able to subdue his natural wisdom, his sense of futility, and the sense of irritation and superiority which exists in the experienced working man: "Nevertheless (how much that hides!) at *thy word* I will let down the net" (Lk. 5:5). It would seem that the parallel record of this is found in Mt. 4:18, which describes the call of the disciples soon after Christ's triumphant emergence from the wilderness temptations. We learn from Jn. 1:41,42 that it was Peter's

brother, Andrew, who first told Peter about Jesus, and who brought him to meet Jesus first of all. The point is that at the time of Peter's call as he was fishing, he had probably heard very few of Christ's words personally. He had heard about Him, and listened to His words for perhaps a few hours at different times in the past. So where did he get this tremendous respect for the word of Christ from, which he demonstrated when Christ called him? The answer must be that he meditated deeply on those words that he had heard and understood, and came to appreciate that the man saying them was worth giving all for. Our far easier access to God's word does not seem to make us more meditative as individuals. We have access to hearing God's word which previous generations never had. We can listen to it on any manner of mobile devices, have recordings of Scripture playing at home, analyse it by computer, hear it sung to us according to our taste in music, read it from pocket Bibles as we work and travel... we *can* and *could* do all these things. My sense is that we just don't make use of our opportunities as we should. Why has God given our generation these special opportunities to be ultra-familiar with His word? Surely it is because our age contains temptations which are simply more powerful than those of former years. So it is *vital*, vital for our eternal destiny, that we do make as much use as possible of all these opportunities. We should be *cramming*, yes cramming, our hearts and brains with the words of God. I certainly get the feeling that Peter would have listened to a recording of Isaiah on his mobile device if he had one, as he went out fishing; that he'd have had tapes of the Psalms going all evening long in his little fisherman's cottage, wife and kids caught up in his enthusiasm too (Mk. 10:10,15 suggests that the incident with the little children occurred in Peter's house).

4:19 And *he said to them: Follow me, and I will make you*- One intention of our calling to the Gospel is to bring others to the Kingdom. Evangelism isn't therefore something intended for only some within the body of Christ. And the Lord has a personal training program for each of us- "I will make you...".

Fishers of men- The Greek *halieus* is literally 'a salty one', from *hals*, salt. The Lord invites all in Him to see themselves as the salty ones of the earth (Mt. 5:13). The call to be fishers, salty ones, is therefore not only for those men on the shore of Galilee, nor for just some of us- but for us all. The Qumran documents spoke of 'the fishers of men' as being those who would condemn Israel in the last day; and yet the Lord clearly had the idea that they were to 'catch' people out of the 'sea' of the nations and bring them to salvation. So the preachers as 'fishers of men' actually have a double role- as Paul put it, to some our preaching is the savour of death, to others, the savour of life (2 Cor. 2:16). Not only does this encourage us as the preachers to *plead* with men to choose life rather than death; but it is a sober reminder that we too face the impact of the

very Gospel which we ourselves preach, and must likewise live lives of ongoing response. We preach, therefore, aimed at a decision- not merely 'witnessing', nor simply imparting helpful information.

4:20 *And they immediately left the nets and followed him*- The Greek word translated "left" is used throughout the Synoptic records of the disciples 'leaving' what they knew in response to the Gospel. They left their nets, then their boat and even their father (:22). The same word is translated 'to forgive'. Because of our experience of having our sins 'let go' by God and His Son, we are thereby motivated to 'let go' not only others' sins and debts to us, but all the ties that bind us to the things of this life. The immediacy of their response is a theme of Matthew's; it is he who begins by so stressing how immediately Joseph and Mary responded.

4:21 *And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them*- They were intending to continue fishing. There was therefore no theatrics attached to their dramatic leaving of all.

4:22 *And they immediately left the boat and their father and followed him*- They became His disciples, that is the meaning of the idiom. The way the Lord called people in the midst of their daily lives, and they immediately "left all and followed Him" is surely recorded to set a pattern for all future response to Him (Mt. 4:22; Mk. 1:18). See on :20. Those fishermen who left their nets had heard the message some time earlier, but the record is framed so as to stress the immediacy and totality of response to Him, in the midst of daily life. In a day when the complexity of modern living can become an excuse to justify almost anything as an expression of discipleship, we need to remember the starker simplicities of Jesus' first call: "Follow me". And the immediate response which was made to it. In this sense, Jesus through His word that makes Him flesh to us, i.e. an imaginable person…still walks up to fishermen, into shops, accountants' offices, school classrooms: and bids us urgently and immediately leave behind our worldly advantage, and follow Him in the way of true discipleship. The immediacy of response is quite a theme (:20, and especially in Mark's early chapters). It continues with the speed at which people were baptized in the Acts.

4:23 And *Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people*- "Went about… teaching… preaching… healing" is just what we read of the Lord's followers doing in Acts. The preaching of the apostles (and of ourselves) continues the personal work of the Lord in whom they lived and moved, and therefore often Acts records the preaching work in language lifted

from Luke as well as the other Gospel records (e.g. Acts 4:2; 5:12-16 = Mt. 4:23).

The preaching of the Kingdom is made parallel to preaching the time of acceptance with God and forgiveness of sins *now* (Lk. 4:43 cp. 19, 2 Cor. 6:2); Rom. 14:17, which seems to teach that the Kingdom of God is more about "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit", both now and eternally, than physical, tangible things. Christ's parables about the Kingdom don't speak of a political Kingdom, but rather about the relationship between God and the believer in the here and now.

4:24 *Then his fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and he healed them*
- The repetition of the word "and..." gives the impression that every kind of illness – physical and mental, understood and not understood – was healed by the Lord Jesus. "Lunatic" translates the Greek *selēniazomai* – "to be moon struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon–struck. But the idea is used, without correction – just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase. "Brought" translates a word which was used in the technical sense of bringing sacrifice- and the idea of converts as sacrifices is repeated in Rom. 15:16.

4:25 *And great crowds followed him, those from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from the other side of the Jordan*- Luke makes the point that His popularity was not only because of the miracles, but because of His teaching. Lk. 4:22 records how people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke; there was something very unusual in His manner of speaking. Because of the gracious words and manner of speaking of Jesus, therefore God so highly exalted Him (Ps. 45:2). The Father was *so* impressed with the words of His Son. Evidently there must have been something totally outstanding about His use of language. God highly exalted Him because He so loved righteousness and hated wickedness (Ps. 45:7), and yet also because of His manner of speaking (Ps. 45:2); so this *love* of righteousness and hatred of evil was what made His words so special.

CHAPTER 5

5:1 *And seeing the crowds, he went into the mountain and when he had sat down, his disciples came to him*- The article suggests a specific mountain in mind- perhaps the great mountain Jesus had in mind in 4:8? Jesus taught up a mountain, suggesting that His teaching is accessible to those who make some effort to receive it. The Sermon on the Mount is the equivalent of the giving of the Law, also on a mountain. As God / the Angel gave the law to Moses, so Jesus did to the disciples. The disciples ascending the mount to receive the teaching parallels them with Moses, with the implication they too were to relay it to Israel. Instead of the people being forbidden to come up the mountain, they were allowed to- for by the end of the Sermon we learn that the multitudes were also there (7:28,29) and descended from the mountain (8:1). The Rabbis also *sat* to teach- but they taught always indoors. The similarities and differences are being emphasized to demonstrate how Jesus was in continuity with Jewish culture and yet also radically different. The scene of Ex. 20 is of Moses ascending the mount to receive the Law, the first part of which was the ten commandments. The beatitudes seem to be the New Covenant's equivalent of the ten commandments- see on 5:22. The Lord's sermon quotes or alludes to all of the ten commandments (excluding the Sabbath) and redefines them (5:21,27). The way the Lord makes no comment upon the command to keep the Sabbath is surely significant. Simplistically, one could argue that He was suggesting that His followers would not be bound by the Sabbath commandment. But it was well understood in the first century that priests on duty were free from the Sabbath legislation. The hint could therefore be that the Lord believed that because His obedient listeners were to live their lives as the new priesthood, they were therefore free from Sabbath legislation. The Lord was surely very conscious that John had come to prepare the way for Him, in terms of Isaiah 40. And yet that same prophecy saw the good news being declared to Jerusalem from a mountain (Is. 40:9). Perhaps the Lord was seeking to consciously fulfil this by going up a mountain and proclaiming blessedness and good news to spiritual Jerusalem. It could be further noted that the Gospel of Matthew features five sections of recorded speeches of Jesus, each concluded by the phrase "When Jesus had finished these sayings" (Mt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). It may be that Matthew is seeking to present the Gospel as a new Torah, with five 'books' to it just as there were in the old Torah.

5:2 *And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying*- As if this struck Matthew, recalling how this manifesto of His teaching first fell from His lips. There may be the implication that what He said was by direct revelation from God.

5:3- see on 5:43.
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven- Our prayers should be like those of a man on death row in a dark dungeon,

waiting to die, but groaning for salvation (Ps. 102:17,20). This is the extent of our desperation. We are "the poor" (Gk. 'the crouchers'), cringing in utter spiritual destitution (Mt. 5:3). And yet we have a terrible tendency to only occasionally *really* pray, content with prayer on a surface level. The Lord's parables invite us to see ourselves as, e.g., the desperate widow woman pleading for deliverance from her oppressive landlord (Lk. 18:3).

5:4 *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*- Associated in the Old Testament with mourning for sin (Ex. 33:4,5; Ezra 10:6; Neh. 8:9; Ps. 38:5,6). The comfort offered in Isaiah was specifically comfort for sinners who realized their desperation (Is. 12:1; 40:1). The time of God's grace was extended, therefore, to those who mourned for their sins (Is. 61:2,3; 66:10). Such Godly sorrow is the sorrow of repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

We noted in chapter 4 that the Lord had in mind the way that John had prepared the way for Him in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40, which spoke of 'comfort' to God's doubting people. If this comfort were accepted, then the glory would come to Zion and John's work would have prepared a highway of repentant people over which the Lord Jesus could have come to Zion and established the Kingdom there and then. Comfort to the mourners was one of Isaiah's descriptions of that possible Kingdom. It could have all happened in the first century, but Israel would not- and so the final fulfilment of this comfort will be at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom fully on earth. "Be comforted" may be a prophesy of the Comforter which was to give a measure of comfort even in this life (Jn. 14:16).

5:5 *Blessed are the meek*- Those humbled by their sins. James, in his commentary on the Sermon, alludes here by saying that God gives grace to the meek, and therefore sinners should cleanse themselves (James 4:6,8-10).

For they shall inherit the earth- Clearly a reference to the promises to Abraham. But it was no good just being a physical descendant of Abraham- humility was the required characteristic. To the Lord, humility was the very *epitome* of righteousness (Mt. 5:5 cp. Ps. 37:29), as Malachi saw pride as the epitome of wickedness (see the parallelism in Mal. 4:1). There is a telling parallelism in Zeph. 2:3 which equates Yahweh God of Israel with humility: "Seek ye Yahweh... seek meekness".

5:6 *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness*- Notice how some of the Lord's very first words on opening His ministry were "*Blessed* (Lk. 1:48) are they which do *hunger* (Lk. 1:53) and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be *filled* (Lk. 1:53)" (Mt. 5:6). Clearly He is

alluding to His mother's own description of herself. It's as if He stands up there before the hushed crowd and lays down His manifesto with those words. This was the keynote of what He had to say to humanity. Everybody was waiting to hear what His message really was. And this is what He said. He was saying 'This, guys, is what I essentially and most fundamentally seek to inspire in you'. And He saw His dear mother as the epitome of the converts He was seeking to make. I lay great store by this allusion. For it makes Mary, at least at the time of the Angel's visit, truly our pattern. She heard the glad tidings and believed that word in faith, holding on to it in her heart (Lk. 8:15,21). She was a model for all who hear the Gospel. It could even be that the language of Lk. 1:32,33,35 is framed in such a way as to make Mary appear to be the first person who heard the gospel about Jesus.
Thirst after righteousness- The characteristics of the 'blessed' in the first four beatitudes are that they will be spiritually poor (:3), mourning (often used in connection with contrition for sin), humbled, and thirsting to be more righteous than they are. "Righteousness" could mean 'justice' but the term is used by Paul to specifically refer to 'justification from sin'. These descriptions immediately give us all the encouragement that this message of the Kingdom is for me, even me. The next blessing is for the merciful, the forgiving, because they shall obtain mercy- i.e. final cleansing from sin and justification on judgment day. Although of course this is possible even now. See on 5:9 *peacemakers* and on 6:12.

For they shall be filled- S.w. Mt. 14:20 about the 'filling' of the multitude who came to hear the word of Jesus. All the Kingdom blessings have some fulfilment in this life. John's version of this is the record of the Lord saying that the salvation He provides would satisfy those who hungered and thirsted for it (Jn. 6:35).

5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*- This is apparently missing in Luke's record. He says instead that the reviled and excluded will be blessed (Lk. 6:22). Samuel Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Happy are they who are excommunicated for they shall receive mercy" (Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1987) p. 75). There's a clear connection with Ps. 18:25: "With the merciful you will show yourself merciful. With the perfect man, you will show yourself perfect". This verse was clearly in the Lord's mind, and it may shed light on His later challenge to be perfect as the Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48)- in this case, He would be inviting us to forgive others as God does. Paul in 2 Tim. 1:16 saw Onesiphorus as the merciful man of Mt. 5:7; and the Jerusalem ecclesia (Heb. 10:34) as the persecuted people of Mt. 5:12.

5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart*- Heb. *bare lev*, also translated 'broken hearted' in Is. 61:1. A pure heart can also be understood in the context of

what happens on repentance and receipt of forgiveness, for Ps. 51:10 uses the term to describe David's position after his repentance and forgiveness (also in Ps. 73:13).

For they shall see God- Again the Lord is encouraging the disciples whom He was addressing to see themselves as Moses (see on 5:1), for Moses was held in Judaism as the only one who had seen God (Ex. 33:11).

5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*- Samuel T. Lachs suggests another original text actually read "Blessed are they that stumble" (Lachs, p. 77), and this would fit with our suggestion made on 5:6 that the 'happy' people are those who are spiritually weak but are accepted and forgiven. However, the reference may be to the priesthood, with whom God made a covenant of peace, that they might bring Israel to peace with Him (Num. 25:12; Mal. 2:6). Just as the Lord encouraged the disciples to see themselves as Moses, so He inspires them with the thought that they, the nothing special, secular Jews, could and would take over the work of the priesthood. Rabbi Hillel "exhorted his students to become disciples of Aaron, 'peace lovers and peacemakers' (mAb1:12)" (As quoted in Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 314).

5:10 *Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*- 'Persecute' is literally 'to drive away' (s.w. Mt. 1:23; 23:34), maybe carrying the idea of excommunication. Being thrown out of the synagogue was a major and frequent occurrence for many who came to Jesus (Jn. 9:22). There are Old Testament connections between persecution and suffering for sin (Dt. 30:1-7), so the Lord could also have in view, as often in the Beatitudes, that He is offering blessing and happiness for the messed up sinners who are suffering in this life for their sins.

5:11 *Blessed are you when men reproach you because of me, and persecute you and falsely accuse you of all sorts of evil*- Quoted by Peter in 1 Pet. 4:14 where he says that we are blessed / happy if we are reviled for the sake of Christ's Name. Verses 10 and 11 seem to imply that persecution, slander and serious opposition is inevitable for all who will follow Christ. Yet when these things happen, we seem to be shocked and surprised.

Paul's extraordinary ability to rejoice in his trials seems to have been rooted in his sustained reflection upon Mt. 5:11,12: "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you... rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward... for so persecuted they the prophets". These words are alluded to in at least 5 verses in his epistles. Again seeking to challenge the prevailing views of the Jewish leadership, the Lord invited His humble fishermen-followers to see themselves as the great prophets of old being persecuted by a wicked Israel (Mt. 5:11). When Corinth

reviled him (2 Cor. 7:4), Paul saw this as being reviled and persecuted after the pattern of Mt. 5:12.

5:12- see on 5:7.
Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for likewise they persecuted the prophets that preceded you- The language of persecution is also rooted very much in the language and experience of the prophets. The similar language in Mk. 13:8-11 and Lk. 21:12-18 suggests the same. Again, just as the Lord has challenged his secular, nothing-special followers to see themselves as Moses, now He invites them to see themselves as the prophets. And so a theme develops in the Sermon- that He is seeking to place the mantle of Moses, David and the prophets upon ordinary, sinful members of spiritual society, seeking to show them their huge potential significance in God's program. And that impression must come home to us too in our situations, no longer considering that spiritual heroics and work for God are somehow for 'the others', the leaders.

5:13 *You are the salt of the earth-* Salt inevitably affects, by reason of *what it is*, whatever is next to it. We are lights in a dark world. Lights give light. If the salt doesn't have the influence of salt, it is thrown away. Our poor record of preaching by personal contact is very worrying when seen in this light. We have hidden behind leaflets and press adverts and giving money. But if we aren't the salt, if we don't show *our* light in our little world; are we in fact the salt or the light of the earth? This unconscious spirituality, this natural witnessing, is the essential reflection of our experience of the Lord Jesus. He didn't say 'Do good works so that men may see the light'. He said "*let your light shine*" - and *then* men will see your good works and glorify the Father.

One characteristic of salt is that it creates thirst. We are mistaken if we assume that all those people out there are just waiting for us to come to them with a series of true doctrinal propositions. Virtually nobody is seriously interested- until they meet you and me. We need to create some sort of realization of need in those we mix with. Through our examples and through the way we make our initial approaches to them, we need to plug in to that basic human hunger for their creator. Plenty of other religions do just this- and we ought to be far more 'in there' than many of us are. The language seems to suggest that unless we are not influencing others, then we will be condemned. As in 4:19, the Lord seems to be teaching that some form of outgoing effect upon others, if not evangelism, is part and parcel of following Him. The parable of the light under the bucket in 5:15 teaches the same.

We *are* the salt of the earth. The Lord doesn't say that we ought to be the salt of the earth, or should try to be. Salt with no flavour or influence is pointless, worthless, untrue to what it is intended to be, displeasing to its

user, fit only to be thrown out; and so are we, if we fail to witness to others (Lk. 14:35). Likewise, we *are* the light of the world. By the very nature of who we are as in Christ, we are to influence the world around us. We don't just hold the light in our hands; *we* are the light, our whole being, every moment we live. Preaching the light is not therefore something which we occasionally do. Sodium chloride (salt) is inert, meaning it remains unchanged by processes acting upon it and retains its characteristics through whatever. In the same way as the believer is the city set on a hill which cannot be hid, the man who builds on rock, the good tree that must bring forth good fruit, so the Lord seems to be saying again that the essential direction of a believer's life is clear. God sees as either His people or not, and there is no grey area. We don't drop in and out of fellowship with Him. And this should be a comfort to us. We are His. Any salt that lost its saltiness was not true salt, but some imitation (at the time, gypsum was sold by rogue salt traders as salt) or just something which appeared like salt- there is some 'salt' from the Dead Sea area which may have been in the Lord's mind. But the point was, that it was not true salt from the start. The covenant of salt was given to Aaron (Num. 18:19)- so yet again, the Lord is encouraging those secular men to see themselves as a new priesthood.
The counter-culture of which Jesus is Lord is indeed radical. The Sermon on the Mount, and so much of Jesus' later teaching, revolves around "us" [His people] acting one way whilst the world acts in another. We are to love all men, whereas the world loves only its friends; we are to pray meaningfully, whilst the Gentile world merely heap up empty phrases; we are to seek the things of God's Kingdom, whilst the world seeks only for material things. Human values are radically reversed in Christ. The humble are exalted and the proud debased; the first are put last, the servant made the greatest. But Jesus also contrasts His followers not only with "the Gentiles" but with the contemporary religious people- the 'scribes and Pharisees'. Thus we are to be radically different both from the nominal church, and the secular world in general. Repeatedly Jesus speaks of "they" and "you"; and yet He also spoke of the handful of Palestinian peasants who really grasped His teaching as being the salt of the earth [Israel?] and the light of the [whole Gentile] world. It was their separateness from the world that was to be a part of the world's salvation. So Jesus was certainly not teaching a bunker mentality, an island existence, but rather a reaching out into the world of others for their salvation. The true radicalism is the radicalism of love- love lived out in ordinary life. Whether we strive for absolute truthfulness, what place we seek at a feast, the struggle to grant real and total forgiveness- this is the radicalism of love.

The beatitudes were spoken generally of all believers, but "You are the salt of the earth" was spoken specifically to the disciples. We can understand the 'earth' as the land- of Israel. The Lord pinned His hopes

for the whole land of Israel on that band of rather unlikely men, most of them secular, non-religious Jews. It was in their power to change and prepare the whole land for Him. The very metaphor of salt was well chosen- for salt was cheap and common. It was by their very earthliness and humanity that their mission was to succeed, just as was the case for the Lord Himself.

But if the salt has lost its savour, with what shall it be salted? It becomes good for nothing but to be thrown out and trodden under the feet of men- The idea could be that if we are not salt for the earth, preparing people to be acceptable sacrifices to God, then there is no plan B. It all depends upon us. And if we don't do that work, then we shall be rejected. Note how Paul speaks of the conversion of people as the offering up in sacrifice of the Gentiles (Rom. 15:16).

"Good" in "good for nothing" has the idea is of being able, to have possibility. If we will not use our potential for good, then we will be rejected, because we have no possibilities for use. It's only when we wilfully lose our potential for good that we really are of no use. Lk. 14:34 carries the same idea- if salt loses savour, what then can be used for seasoning ["wherewith shall it be salted"]? The idea is surely that if salt cannot be used for making salty- then it can be used for nothing, it has no practical use.

The same phrase "thrown out" is used about the rejection of the wicked at the last day (Mt. 13:48; Jn. 15:6). The 'treading underfoot by men' would then refer to the faithful having some part to play in the condemnation of the wicked. The idiom may mean that they will be despised by them. Or there could be a literal element to it (Mal. 4:3 "the wicked shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in that day"). It is not for us to thus judge others *now* because we are to do so *then*.

5:14 *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid*- The reference is surely to Jerusalem, which was known as the city set on a hill (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: S.P.C.K., 2001) p. 289). The connection between this city and "the light of the world" is clearly drawing from Old Testament descriptions of Jerusalem being a light to which the true Israel would rally and the Gentile world would come for enlightenment about the true God (Ps. 132:17 cp. 1 Kings 11:34-36; Is. 2:2; 60:1; 66:20). Jerusalem was the classic external symbol of Israel and Judaism- and the Lord is saying that His largely non-religious, secular Jewish disciples were to be the true Zion for the enlightenment of both Israel and the world. This is similar to His invitation for them to see themselves as Moses, who alone "saw God", and sharing in the persecutions of the prophets. This high calling echoes down to us- we who like to think that we are not amongst God's great heroes, and who prefer to leave the dramatic acts of faith to our leaders and high

profile members. But the calling is to each of us, to be of no less significance than them, not to hide behind the grand religious symbols of faith such as the temple and the city of Jerusalem- but to be those things in daily life. Judaism understood the Levitical priesthood as the light of the Jewish and Gentile worlds. The Testament of Levi 14:3 claimed of the priesthood: "For as the heaven is purer in the Lord's sight than the earth, so also be ye, the lights of Israel, (purer) than all the Gentiles [or in another manuscript "ye who are the lights of Israel, shall be as the sun and moon"]". And yet as so often in the Sermon, the Lord applies the language of priesthood to his secular, spiritually poor listeners.

There appears the idea that if we hide who we are from others, then we are not really Christian. A city on a hill cannot possibly be covered. It is totally public. There must be an element about our discipleship which is likewise absolutely open and obvious to the world. When the Lord returns, it would be strange indeed if our neighbours were shocked to know that we were actually one of His people. The same word is used about the man who 'hid' the talent of the Gospel (Mt. 25:25). The relevance of this emphasis in the first century world was that it was apparently easier to merely quietly assent to Christian teaching, rather than come out in the open about it. The same word is used of how Joseph of Arimathea 'secretly', hiddenly, believed, for fear of the Jews (Jn. 19:38). But in the end, he 'came out', as we all are lead to do by providential circumstance and our own growing conviction of Christ.

All those who preach Him are like a city that cannot be hidden (Mt. 5:14); just as He likewise "could not be hid" in His preaching (Lk. 7:24). He was the light of the world, and so are we. In the work of witness, we find ourselves especially united to Him. We are Him to this world, and in a sense, He only shines in this world through us. Witnessing is in a sense for our benefit. Perhaps in answer to the unspoken question 'How can we avoid losing our saltiness?', the Lord replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. The city set on a hill is specifically spoken as being Nazareth, where the Lord had grown up (Lk. 4:29). Jesus must've seen the town from the distance and thought out His teaching over the years before He now publicly stated it.

5:15 *Neither do men light a lamp and put it under a basket but on the stand; and it shines for all that are in the house*- The Lord speaks of how we are the light of the world, giving light to the world in the same way as "they" light a lamp. Who are the "they"? The point has been made that to 1st century Palestinian ears, the answer was obvious: Women. Because lighting the lamps was a typical female duty, which men were not usually involved in. Could it not be that the Lord Jesus even *especially* envisaged women as His witnesses? Did He here have in mind how a great company

of women would be the first to share the news that the light of the world had risen?

The Greek article in "the lamp / candlestick" refers to the specific candlestick, and to Jewish minds this would surely have referred to the candlestick in the Holy Place (s.w. Heb. 9:2). This continues the theme of the Lord teaching a new form of Judaism, for His sermon on the mount is full of allusions to previous Mosaic practice, but redefining it. The implication of :16 is that ordinary men are present in the Holy Place too, who will see our light. Or it could be that Jesus has in mind how it was the priests who alone entered the Holy Place- and He is saying that the light from those who followed Him would illuminate the Jewish priesthood. The light of the candlestick is both the believer (Mt. 5:15) and the Gospel itself (Mk. 4:21). We are to be the Gospel. We must burn as a candle now, in shedding forth the light, or we will be burnt at the judgment (Mt. 5:15 and Jn. 15:6 use the same words). This is but one of many examples of the logic of endurance; we must burn anyway, so why not do it for the Lord's sake and reap the reward.

The story of the candle that was put under a bucket brings out an issue related to that of the desire to root up the tares: the candle was put there (presumably) on account of an almost paranoiac fear that the wind would blow it out; but this over-protection of the lamp in itself caused the light to go out (Mt. 5:15). Time and again, preaching the light, holding up the beacon of the word of Christ's cross, has been impeded or stifled in the name of preserving the truth, strengthening what remains (words taken out of context). And because of this lack of witness, this lack of holding out the light to others, the fire of Christ has waxed dim amongst us. This ties in to the theme that preaching is not just commanded as a publicity exercise for Almighty God; He doesn't need us to do that for Him. It is commanded for the benefit of the preacher more than those preached to. To put a candle under a bucket or bed seems senseless; yet this is how senseless and inappropriate it is to hold back preaching for the sake of defending the Faith. Indeed, to put it under a bed (Mk. 4:21) and then go to sleep (candles are normally only lit at night) is likely to destroy the person who does it, to burn them while they are asleep. All who have the light but don't preach it (in whatever form) are likely to suffer the same; notice how the Lord (by implication) links night time and sleepiness with an apathy in preaching. Evidently the Lord foresaw the attitude that has surfaced amongst His people: 'We must concentrate on keeping the Truth, new converts are often problematic, too much energy goes to preaching rather than building up ourselves in the faith'. Probably the resistance to preaching to the Gentiles in the first century used similar reasoning. The Lord may have had in mind a Talmud entry (*Shabbat* 107a) which permitted the covering of a lamp with a bowl on the Sabbath if it was done in order to stop the entire house catching fire. He is arguing that such a fear based attitude, fearful of possible

consequence if we share the light, will result in the light going out. And that lesson needs to be learnt time and again.

5:16 *Likewise, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven*- These are those "in the house[hold]" (:15), "those who enter" (Lk. 8:16; 11:33). The general public does not seem to glorify God because of good works. 2 Cor. 9:2 seems to understand the verse as meaning that we give light and opportunity for praise to other believers. Paul writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise. I don't mean, of course, in the proud manner of many charity donors, trying to outshine each other before the publics' gaze by their 'generosity'. I mean that in the graces of forgiveness, kindness in a myriad modest ways, that we see performed by others, we will find *our* motivation to do likewise. For rightly-performed good works are a light to the world; perhaps it is their very modesty which makes them "*shine* before men". So in this sense we will perceive others' acts of grace and be inspired by them, no matter how discreetly and modestly done they are. For they inevitably shine in a way that gives light to all who are in the (ecclesial) house, so that they too glorify the Father (Mt. 5:16).

It could be that the "men" who glorify God in Heaven are the Angels- the same "men" who lit our candle in the first place (:15). "Men" in the parables who do the 'gathering' of our fruits (Jn. 15:6; Mt. 7:16) represent Angels, who are the ones who will actually do the gathering at the last day (Mt. 13:41; 24:31). This seems to make most sense, and avoids the idea of our doing good works specifically in order to impress men. And men do not glorify God just because they see our good works. But Angels, who lit our candle in the first place, notice how our light is shining out to others "in the house", and glorify God in Heaven ["*is* in Heaven" is unjustified- the idea is that they glorify the Father, in Heaven]. In this interpretation, the "men" are different to those who are "in the house".

5:17 *Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I came not to destroy but to fulfil*- The idea that the Lord Jesus ended the Law of Moses on the cross needs some reflection. That statement only pushes the question back one stage further- how exactly did He 'end' the Law there? How did a man dying on a cross actually end the Law? The Lord Jesus, supremely in His death, was "the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4). But the Greek *telos* ["end"] is elsewhere translated "the goal" (1 Tim. 1:5 NIV). The character and person of the Lord Jesus at the end was the goal of the Mosaic law; those 613 commandments, if perfectly obeyed, were intended to give rise to a personality like that of the Lord Jesus. When He

reached the climax of His personal development and spirituality, in the moment of His death, the Law was “fulfilled”. Then, it was "accomplished" (:18), and *ginomai* there is usually used about events being accomplished; the supreme event in view is the cross. The Lord taught that He “came” in order to die; and yet He also “came” in order to “fulfil” the Law (Mt. 5:17). Mt. 5:17 = Gal. 5:14. Christ fulfilled the Law by His supreme love of His neighbour (us) as Himself. The Law of Moses was intended to create a perfect man- if it were to be totally obeyed. The Lord Jesus did this- and therefore there was no more need for the Law. Yet the Beatitudes were addressed to those who hungered to be righteous, and who were spiritually poor, having broken God's laws. It was therefore in this context that the Lord Jesus sets before those very people the ultimate good news- that He has come determined to succeed in perfect obedience to the Law, and thus fulfilling it, He would remove its binding nature upon others. Hence the Law was added *until* the Seed should come (Gal. 3:19). This conclusion (in broad terms) was also arrived at by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: S.C.M., 2001 ed.) pp. 74-76). The Lord's total obedience and fulfilling of the Law is therefore further good news for we who have failed both historically and in present life to keep it.

5:18 *For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any way pass from the law, until all things be accomplished*- Vine comments: "Jot is for jod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Tittle is the little bend or point which serves to distinguish certain Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Jewish tradition mentions the letter jod as being irremovable; adding that, if all men in the world were gathered to abolish the least letter in the law, they would not succeed. The guilt of changing those little hooks which distinguish between certain Hebrew letters is declared to be so great that, if such a thing were done, the world would be destroyed".

5:19 *Whoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments*- See on 'jot and tittle' (:18). Note the connection between breaking "these least commandments" and being "least in the Kingdom". The least in the Kingdom will therefore be those who didn't consider the small things worthy of their attention. But the principle is that by our attitude to that which is "least" we show our appropriacy to receive that which is great (Lk. 16:10 s.w.).

And shall teach men to do so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven- The Lord explained that “the least in the Kingdom of Heaven” would have broken “the least” commandments, and would have taught men so (Mt. 5:19); and yet “the least in the Kingdom” was a phrase He elsewhere used about those who would actually be in the

Kingdom (Mt. 11:11; 25:40 "the least of these my brothers"). Here surely is His desire to save, and His gracious overlooking of intellectual failure, human misunderstanding, and dogmatism in that misunderstanding ('teaching men so'). The idea of being called / named / pronounced great or least in the Kingdom suggests differing degrees of reward distributed at judgment day. The idea of being called / named at the day of judgment has just been used in Mt. 5:9 (s.w.). There is thus the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

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It is Jesus Himself who shall be called great (the same two words used in Lk. 1:32 "He shall be *great* and shall be *called* the Son of the Highest"). The one who would do and teach supremely would be Jesus. Here, as so often, the Lord makes an oblique reference to Himself (as in mentioning that some seed would bring forth one hundred fold). The fact we teach others to do righteousness will be a factor in our acceptance (Mt. 5:19);

although not the only one. Again we see the implication that we are to somehow teach others, to engage with others, in order to be acceptable.

5:20 *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no way enter into the kingdom of heaven*- The Lord asks us to *exceed* the "righteousness" of the Pharisees (Mt. 5:20). By "righteousness" he refers to their charity, for which they were well known. In addition to tithing ten percent of absolutely everything, they gave a fifth of their income to charity such as widows, orphans, newly-wedded couples etc. In addition they made anonymous gifts in a "quiet room" of the Temple. How does our giving compare to that? And the Lord challenges us that unless we *exceed* that, "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven". Radical, challenging words- that are hard to re-interpret or get around. And yet surely the answer is that super-abounding (AV 'exceeding') righteousness is only attainable by being justified / counted righteous in Christ. The Lord's challenging statement was surely in order to lead us to the same conclusions reached in Romans 1-8 about being counted righteous when we have no righteousness of our own. For to super-abundantly exceed the technical, points-scoring righteousness of the Pharisees was well-nigh impossible.

'Entering the Kingdom' is a very common idea in the Lord's teaching. But He understood people to be 'entering' the Kingdom right now ("them that are entering", Mt. 23:13). In the same way as judgment is ongoing now, so is condemnation and entry into the Kingdom.

5:21 *You have heard that it was said to those of old: You shall not kill, and whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment*- Jesus was addressing the illiterate poor. Elsewhere, to the educated and literate, He says that they are aware that "It is *written*". Here He quotes both one of the ten commandments and also the tradition of the elders. We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*" (Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

5:22 *But I say to you*- Having quoted one of the ten commandments, Jesus implies that His teaching now supersedes them. See on 5:1.

That everyone who is angry with his brother- We are all brothers and sisters, each of us adopted into the Divine family, each of us freed slaves, rejoicing in that pure grace. Most times the NT speaks of 'brothers', it is in the context of tensions between people (see Mt. 5:21-24, 43-48; 7:1-5; 18:15-35). We can't separate ourselves from our brethren any more than we can from our natural families. Once a brother, we are always a brother. No matter what disappointments and disagreements we may have, we are baptized into not only the Lord Jesus personally, but also into a never ending relationship with each other. We cannot walk away from it.

Without a cause- As added in some texts and AV. The Greek is always translated elsewhere 'vainly', the idea being 'in vain', 'without an effect'. Anger which doesn't achieve anything positive is wrong. God's anger is creative- e.g. the 'anger' of His judgment through the flood brought about the salvation of the faithful. Anger therefore is not in itself wrong. The motives are all important.

Shall be in danger of the judgment, and whoever shall say to his brother Raca shall be in danger of the council, and whoever shall say Moros shall be in danger of the fire of Gehenna- One of the major themes of the Lord's teaching in the sermon on the mount was the need to respect others; to see the value and meaning of persons. Indeed, it can rightly be said that all sin depersonalizes another person. Sin is almost always against persons. Relentlessly, ruthlessly, the Lord drives deeper, and yet deeper, into the very texture of human personality in demanding that, e.g., we are not even angry with others, lest we effectively murder them. To say "Raca" to your brother was to commit sin worthy of serious judgment, He taught (Mt. 5:22). "Ra-ca" was the sound made when a man cleared his throat to spit, and it was a term of abuse in earlier Semitic languages. To despise your brother, to disregard his importance as a person, was to be seen as an ultimate sin. In this light we should seek to avoid the many terms of abuse which are so common today: "a right idiot" etc. The Law taught that one should not curse a deaf person. Think what this really means. Surely the essence of it is that we should never be abusive, in any form, to or about anyone, even if it is sure that they will never know or feel our abuse.
Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who *says* to his brother 'Raca' or 'Thou fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction

because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

His standards were sometimes unbelievably high. Whoever called his brother a fool (Gk. *more*- a moron, but implying a rebel, an apostate- Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23 LXX) was liable to eternal condemnation by Him. John Stott claims that the Greek may directly transliterate the Hebrew word *mara* (a rebel or apostate) (John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount: Christian Counter-culture* (Leicester: I.V.P., 2003) p.84). The fact that calling our brother a 'fool' warrants definite condemnation surely implies of itself that the term meant that the fool would be condemned at judgment day. If we condemn others, even if they are to be condemned, then we shall be condemned. That is the Lord's message. We must remember that in Hebrew thought, to pronounce a curse upon a person was seen as highly meaningful and likely to come about. To declare someone as condemned at the future judgment seat would therefore have had a huge psychological effect upon the person. They would have felt that they really would be condemned. The evil practice of disfellowshipping individuals, implying implicitly and at times explicitly that they have no place in the body of Christ, can have the same effect. When the Lord spoke about calling your brother a fool being the same as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15), He may well have been thinking of the passage in Leviticus 19:16-18: "Thou shall not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people... thou shalt not hate thy neighbour in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise (frankly, NIV) rebuke thy neighbour... thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge... but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". The fact this passage is expanded upon so many times in Proverbs would indicate that gossip was as major a problem among the old Israel as it is among the new. But notice the fine psychology of the Spirit here: gossip in the church is related to having a grudge, to hating your neighbour in your heart, to not loving your neighbour as you love yourself (and we are *very* conservative about our own failings). To hate your brother in your heart, to gossip about him, was and is as bad as murdering him. And this same connection between gossip and murder is made in the prophets (Ez. 22:9 cp. Prov. 26:22). But the Law provided a way out. If you had something against your brother, frankly tell him about his failure, *so that* you would not hate him in your heart. If we

don't do this, or try to get someone else to do it, we will end up hating our brother in our heart and we will gossip about him.

"In danger of" in the Greek doesn't imply a mere possibility, but rather, that such a person will receive the threatened judgment. "The council" refers to the Sanhedrin; but you didn't come before them for muttering 'Raca'. The Lord surely meant that such would come before the Heavenly council, of Angels. For this was a well-known, Old Testament based idea- that there is a Heavenly council of Angels. And Christ will come with the Angels with Him to judge us. So the rejected will first come before the Lord, then the Angelic council, and then condemnation. It could be argued that calling a brother 'Raca' and being angry at him without a cause would lead to discussion about this at the day of judgment; but not condemnation ['hell fire', Gehenna]. Only pronouncing a brother a 'fool', i.e. positively condemned and not to enter God's Kingdom, would lead to that condemnation. There appears to be a three stage progression here from judgment / discussion to council (Gk. *sanhedrin*), to condemnation in Gehenna. It could be that the three ideas are all parallel. But it's tempting to see them rather as a progression, and to note the similarity with the three stage progression of Mt. 18:15-17, where in case of interpersonal conflict there was firstly a private reasoning with the brother, then bringing the church together to discuss the case (cp. the Sanhedrin), and then treating the person as a sinner. However, the surrounding context of Mt. 18:15-17 suggests to me that the Lord spoke all that tongue in cheek and did not intend it to be obeyed literally. For the question of the context is 'If my brother sins against me'. The Lord outlines the three step scenario- and then says that if your brother sins against you, forgive him 70 x 7, that is, even if his repentance seems less than credible, without seeking to test the legitimacy of his repentance. The three stage process was well known in Judaism, and the connection with Mt. 5:22 shows that in the Lord's thinking, it was an attempt to reflect the judgment and condemnation of God in the community of believers today. And that is precisely what the Lord implores us *not* to do (especially in Mt. 7:1). *We* are not to attempt to mimic Heaven's judgment and condemnation in our encounter with our brethren in this life. There are churches and groups who seek to follow Mt. 18:15-17 to the letter, claiming they are being Biblical in their approach. But some more research would indicate that perhaps by doing so they are doing exactly what the Lord did not want us to do, and by doing so may be placing themselves in danger of condemnation.

5:23 *If therefore*- The link with :22 is not immediately apparent. The idea seems to be that we should reconcile with our brother in order to avoid the temptation to unwarranted anger with our brother, muttering 'raca' about him, or pronouncing him a condemned fool. If we are unreconciled,

even if the situation is our brother's fault because *he* has something against *us*, then we are liable to the temptation to become wrongly aggressive and condemnatory towards him. And this is a significant part of spiritual life- getting ourselves into an environment of thought and situation with others where temptation will not press so strongly upon us. It's easy to leave situations unreconciled, but time does not actually heal them, and the situations lead to temptations towards aggression and judgmental attitudes which may lead to our condemnation.

You are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you- I'd always read this, or perhaps glanced over it, as saying that I shouldn't offer my gift on the altar if *I* had something against my brother, but I should reconcile with him; but seeing *I* have nothing against anyone, well I can just go on in serving the Lord. There may be others who have a problem with me, but then, that is for them to sort out with me. But no. The Lord is saying: 'If your brother has something *against you*; if the fault is *his*... then *you* take the initiative and try to reconcile it, before doing anything else'.

5:24 *Leave your gift before the altar and go your way*- The only Old Testament case of an interrupted sacrifice was Cain and Abel. Yahweh told Cain that if he would 'do well', then his sacrifice would be accepted, and Yahweh appears to suggest an animal for Cain to offer (Gen. 4:7)- on this basis I would suggest that the sacrificial meeting was interrupted by Cain murdering Abel. The Lord also may have in view the way that a thief or deceiver could repent by putting things right with his brother *and then* offering a sacrifice (Lev. 6:4-6). The Lord is assuming that we are guilty- and this is part of the hyperbole. If you have a relationship breakdown with your brother, then you are guilty. That's the hyperbole; we are not always guilty, but the Lord is making the point that we simply must do all within our power to reconcile, with a sense of pounding urgency. Refusal to talk to our brethren is absolutely not the right way. The Lord also surely has in mind the teaching that the sacrifice of the wicked is unacceptable (Prov. 15:8; 21:27). Again the hyperbolic point is that we should act as if we are the guilty party in the case of relationship breakdown, and act with urgency to put things right. For time never heals in these cases- the longer the situation continues, the harder it is to ever resolve. Perhaps in turn Paul alludes to these things by urging us to examine ourselves (and his context is to examine our attitude to our brother) before we make the sacrifice at the Lord's table in the breaking of bread (1 Cor. 11:27,28)- 'the Lord's table' was another way of speaking about the altar, thus making the breaking of bread meeting the equivalent of offering sacrifice under the Old Covenant.

First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your

gift- Particularly in that watershed night of wrestling, Jacob was our example. The Lord taught that we must all first be reconciled with our brother before we meet with God with our sacrifices (Mt. 5:24)- an obvious allusion to Jacob's reconciliation with Esau in his heart, and then meeting with God. We really must *all* go through that process, whether in one night or a longer period. Reconciliation with our brother is required before acceptably meeting God. And yet many if not most die unreconciled with someone. This is one window onto the necessity of the judgment seat- it is for our benefit rather than the Lord's. There we will become reconciled to our brethren as we observe their judgments, realizing why they were as they were, and perceiving our own desperate need for grace. The tough alternative to this suggestion is that those who refuse to reconcile with their brethren in this life shall not therefore meet the Lord acceptably. Now we perhaps understand better what Paul meant when he urged us "as much as lies in *you*" to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18). Given that Christ can come at any moment, or our lives end, there is an urgency in all this. Which lead the Lord to urge us to reconcile "quickly" with our brother at any cost (:25). See on :25 *lest at any time*.

5:25 *Agree with your adversary*- The context of the preceding verses imply this is our brother. The Lord recognized there would be satans and personal adversaries within His ecclesia.

Quickly- We must agree with our adversary quickly, for we are on our way to judgment (Mt. 5:25). This continues Matthew's theme of immediate response; see on 4:20. The call of the Gospel is effectively a call to go to judgment. If we truly perceive this, and our coming need for the utmost grace, we will settle our differences with our brethren- "quickly". The whole Kingdom of God is likened to the parable of the virgins about the judgment (Mt. 25:1). We are *speeding* towards judgment, therefore we should watch with urgency what manner of people we are (2 Pet. 3:11,12). This urgency of our approach to preaching is in harmony with the generally urgent call to spiritual life which there is everywhere in the Lord's teaching. He gives the impression that we are living life on a knife edge. He saw men as rushing to their destruction. We are the accused man on the steps of the court, whose case is hopeless. Now is the very last moment for him to settle up with his brother (Mt. 5:25 cp. Lk. 12:58). We're like the unjust steward, with a knife at our throat because all our deceptions have been busted. *Everything* is at risk for the guy. Life in prison, goodbye to wife and kids, poverty… stretch out before him. He *must* get right with his brethren by forgiving them their debts. We can't come before God with our offering, i.e. our request for forgiveness, if our brother has any complaint against us regarding unforgiveness (Mt. 5:23). Forgiving each other is as important as that. As we judge, so we will be judged. Our attitude to the

least of the Lord’s brethren is our attitude to Him. There are likely no readers who don’t need this exhortation- to ensure that they have genuinely forgiven all their brethren, and that so far as lies within them, they are at peace with all men. At any moment the bridegroom may return… so have your lamp burning well, i.e. be spiritually aware and filled with the Spirit. Put on your wedding garment, the righteousness of Jesus, before it’s too late (Mt. 22:11-13). He’s just about to come. The judge stands before our door, as James puts it.

While you are with him in the street- Gk. "in the way”. The Lord seems to have in mind Joseph's admonition to his brothers to not fall out whilst in the way together, but to abide under the deep impression of his grace towards them (Gen. 45:24).

Lest- The idea seems to be 'In case he...', or even perhaps stronger, implying 'because he will...'. Surveying the NT usage of the term, it generally seems to imply that 'this will be the case'. The idea is that if you have an adversary and do not reconcile with him, then you will be found guilty. The facts of the case don't come into it- if you are unreconciled, then you are guilty. Thus hyperbole is to reinforce the point made in :24- that reconciliation is so vital. There is of course the unspoken rider, that we must be reconciled "as much as lies in you" (Rom. 12:18). Paul died apparently unreconciled to many brethren- they in Asia had turned away from him personally (note the irony, that they 'turned away; (2 Tim. 1:15) from the one who had 'turned them away' from idols (Acts 19:26)), although some of the believers in Asia are addressed positively by the Lord Jesus in the letters of Rev. 2 and 3. But the point of the Lord's hyperbole is that those unreconciled to their brethren will be tempted to get into aggressive and condemnatory attitudes which may well lead to their exclusion from the Kingdom. And therefore He uses this hyperbole- that the unreconciled will be certainly found guilty and condemned, simply because they are unreconciled and have adversaries amongst their brethren.

The adversary deliver you- The implication is that our brother has the power to deliver us to judgment, or not. Again we see how reconciliation is a choice; it is in our power to bring our brother to judgment for certain things, and that process might even lead to his condemnation. But, the metaphor implies, we can *not* be adversarial, reconcile, and therefore our brother will not come to judgment for being unreconciled with us.

To the judge- The synagogue official. Luke seems to translate the Palestinian style of things into terms which were understandable by a Roman audience. Thus Lk. 6:47; 11:33 speak of houses with cellars,

which were uncommon in Palestine; and in Lk. 8:16; 11:33 of houses with an entrance passage from which the light shines out. The synagogue official of Mt. 5:25 becomes the "bailiff" in Lk. 12:58. In Palestine, the cultivation of mustard in garden beds was forbidden, whereas Lk. 13:19 speaks of mustard sown in a garden, which would have been understandable only to a Roman audience. It seems in these cases that inspiration caused Luke to dynamically translate the essence of the Lord's teaching into terms understandable to a non-Palestinian audience. Even in Mt. 5:25 we read of going to prison for non-payment of debts, which was not the standard Jewish practice. Imprisonment was unknown in Jewish law. The point of all this is to show that we must match our terms and language to our audience.

And the judge deliver you to the officer and you be thrown into prison- There will be degrees of punishment. For some, the judge will pass them to the officer, who will cast them into prison (i.e. condemnation). For others, the judgment will pass them to the council and from there to hell fire (Mt. 5:21-25). Although the wages of sin will still be death at the judgment, it will be a "sorer punishment" for those under the New Covenant than those under the Old. Because there are, in some way, degrees of sin, there must also be degrees of punishment (2 Chron. 28:13,22; 1 Cor. 6:18; Lev. 5:18 note "according to thy estimation"; Judas had a "greater sin" than Pilate, Jn. 19:11). The punishment of the wicked at judgment will somehow take this into account. If the rejected are destroyed together (Mt. 13:30) and yet there are varying degrees of punishment, it follows that the punishment must be on a mental level; and "gnashing of teeth" certainly fits in with this suggestion. The progression judge-officer-prison is similar to judgment-council-Gehenna condemnation in :22. I suggested that this may refer to the stages of the judgment process for the condemned at the last day, with unresolved sin being passed further on to others [Angels?] to consider. I suggested also that perhaps judgment and council may refer to unresolved sins being referred to more serious processes of judgment, out of which we may still emerge 'saved', but have eternally learnt our lesson. The same idea may be here- and even the final 'prison' can be exited, although at great cost to us (although on the other hand, a similar metaphor is used in Mt. 18:34 for the unforgiving debtor who is cast into prison and tormented "until he should pay all that was due". This could be speaking of condemnation). These metaphors may all be speaking about the learning process through which the unreconciled may have to pass at judgment day.

The rejected amongst the people of God will in some ways share the condemnation of the world which they loved. It may be that there will be different geographical areas of punishment; some are cast into fire, others into outer darkness, into prison (Mt. 5:25)... or are these simply

saying that there will be different kinds of punishment? Or are they different figures for the same thing? Whatever, the sense that the day is drawing near should find expression in the love and care we show towards our brethren. The Lord exhorts to agree with our adversary quickly, whilst we are on the way to judgment- and He says this in the context of warning us to be reconciled with our brother (Mt. 5:23,25). In the light of approaching judgment there is an urgency about our need for reconciliation both with our brother and thereby with God (is He the "adversary" in the parable?). All this talk about reconciliation is placed in the Lord's opening manifesto of His fundamental values and beliefs. It should have the same prominence in our thinking and action.

5:26 *Truly I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny*- This may refer to the eternity of final condemnation for having been unreconciled to our brethren. In this case, we need to do all we can so that each and every situation of lack of reconciliation is truly not our fault. At the very least we are to have an open table to all our brethren. But not getting out "until" could mean that a slack attitude to reconciliation with our brethren will lead to dire consequences for us in this life, and there will be no way out until whatever our fault was in the matter, our debt, is completely manifested and paid.

5:27 *You have heard that it was said: You shall not commit adultery*- AV "Said by them of old time". The Lord seems to avoid saying 'By Moses'. He seems to be stressing that the ten commandments had come down to them in oral form; and He was standing before them actually telling them new commandments. The contrast is 'They said... but I say', rather than 'Moses wrote, but I write...'.

5:28 *But I say to you, that everyone that looks on a woman*- Bathsheba was "very beautiful to *look upon*" (2 Sam. 11:2). And David did just that. Our Lord surely had his eye on that passage when he spoke about him that "*looketh on* a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already" (Mt. 5:28). Jubilees 4:15,22, a commonly known book in Judaism at the Lord's time, claimed that the sons of God of Gen 6.2 were Angels who fell because they lusted with their eyes after "the daughters of men". As so often in the Bible, wrong ideas are alluded to and corrected. It was not that Angels sinned by lustful looks leading to adultery- this language is reapplied to us as humans. Looking on a woman lustfully is also the language of Job 31:1: "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?". Job recognized that if he did so, this would be the same as actually committing the deed. He says he will not look lustfully on a maid because "Is not destruction to the wicked? and a strange punishment to the *workers* of iniquity?" (Job 31:3). Thus Job's understanding that a lustful look in the heart was working iniquity was at the basis of Christ's teaching.

Lusting for her- Gk. 'to set the heart upon'. The Lord is not speaking about involuntary turning of the eyes to simply look at a woman.

Has already committed adultery with her in his heart- Gk. 'even now'. The suggestion is that the adultery is going to happen in real physical terms, but it happened before God at the time of fantasizing it. It seems to me that the sense of the Greek here implies that an act of actually physically committed fornication will always begin with lust for the act in the heart. This is not to say that sexual fantasy is OK and only actually performing it is sinful. But the sense of 'even now' would appear to mean that this is not what the Lord is teaching here. He is saying that acts of fornication are actually committed ahead of the act- within the human heart. Sexual fantasy about forbidden partners would surely be outlawed by the many NT commands about spiritual mindedness- e.g. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

5:29 *And if your right eye causes you to stumble*- To make to stumble, not to give umbrage. The eye must surely be understood in the context of :28. It could be that the Lord specifically has sexual sin in mind. It is His form of "Flee fornication". Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28.

Pluck it out- The Greek word is every other time translated to save or deliver.

And throw it away - The Lord taught that we should cut off those parts of our lives that offend us, and “cast it [away] from you”- because in the end, the whole body of the wicked person will be “cast [away] into hell” (Mt. 5:29- the same Greek word is used in both places in this same verse). What He’s saying surely is that we must recognize those parts of our lives which are worthy of condemnation, and *we* must condemn them now in this life, dissociating our spiritual self from our carnal self as Paul does in Rom. 7- for this is the meaning of the figure of ‘casting away’. He has just used the term in 5:13,25, and it is so often used to mean 'cast to condemnation' elsewhere too (Mt. 3:10; 7:19; 13:42,50; 18:30; Lk. 12:49; Jn. 15:6). We are to "cast out" the parts of our lives which offend us, and if we don't, we will be "cast" into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 5:29.30). The word play on "cast" is obviously intentional; the Lord clearly has the idea that we are to self-condemn those things in our lives which are sinful and worthy of condemnation. If we don't, then we will be 'cast out' in our entirety at judgment day. Sin is to be condemned; we either condemn ourselves for it now, or we will be condemned for it then.

For it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish and not your whole body be thrown into Gehenna- The idea of self-condemnation is continued here. If we literally cut off part of our body, it perishes. If we do not, then the whole body will perish in Gehenna, the condemnation of the last day. For God is able to destroy [s.w. to perish] the body in Gehenna (Mt. 10:28). So we are to make perish those parts of our lives which make us sin- i.e. we are to condemn them.

5:30- see on 7:19.

And if your right hand causes you to stumble- Not just 'your hand'. The right hand was a Hebrew idiom for the power, the thinking, the dominant desire of a man. If it's all taking us the wrong way, we must cut it off- and cast it from us, with no regrets about what we have given up.

Cut it off and throw it away, for it is profitable for you that one of your members should perish and not your whole body go into Gehenna- Even though Jesus never sinned, He reveals a remarkable insight into the process of human sin, temptation and subsequent moral need. This was learnt not only from reflection on Old Testament teaching, but surely also by a sensitive seeking to enter into the feelings and processes of the sinner. This is why no sinner, ourselves included, need ever feel that this perfect Man is somehow unable to be touched by the feeling of our infirmities. Consider how He spoke of looking upon a woman to lust after her; and how He used the chilling figure of cutting out the eye or hand that offended (Mt. 5:29)- the very punishments meted out in Palestine at the time for sexual misbehaviour. He had surely observed men with eyes on stalks, looking at women. Although He never sinned, yet He had thought Himself into their likelihood of failure, He knew all about the affairs going on in the village, the gutter talk of the guys at work... yet He knew and reflected upon those peoples' moral need, they were questions to Him that demanded answers, rather than a thanking God that He was not like other men were. Reflect on the characters of the Lord's parables. They cover the whole gamut of first century Palestinian life- labourers and elder sons and officials and mums and dads. They were snapshots of typical human behaviour, and as such they are essays in the way Jesus diagnosed the human condition; how much He had reflected upon people and society, and perceived our tragic need as nobody else has. He invites the zealous saint to cut off the various limbs of the body (for they *all* cause offence at some time!), so that he might enter the Kingdom. To the Jewish mind, imagining such a scene would have created the impression of priestly action. The sensitive reader is invited to see himself as "the offering and the priest".

5:31 *It was also said: Whoever shall send away his wife, let him give her a contract of divorce*- I suggested earlier that the Lord was carefully not

saying that 'Moses said this, but I say differently'. But now He moves on to criticize the teaching of the religious leaders about divorce, which had effectively been elevated to the level of God's law. Divorce was often practiced in ancient societies for trivial reasons and in the heat of the moment. The divorce contract demanded by Moses however required some forethought; for one thing it had to be written, which in a largely illiterate society would involve getting others involved. And the contract would have stated the reasons, and the conditions regarding any issues of maintenance. This is a far superior and more morally developed way than in many primitive societies.

5:32 *But I say to you, that everyone that divorces his wife, except for the cause of sexual immorality*- The Lord has in view the guilty Pharisees of the Hillel school who were twisting Dt. 24:1-4 to mean that one could divorce for any reason so long as a divorce paper was written. Jesus at this point is not addressing the Pharisees but His potential followers. He is probably citing this well-known controversy in order to demonstrate how motives behind an action are what are culpable. He is inviting His hearers to consider the motive for divorce and perceive that as all important, rather than the fact of divorce. This is why I suggest the key word in this verse is *logos*, translated "cause". It is the *logos* of fornication which is the reason for divorce (see on 5:37). The thinking, reasoning, idea of fornication is what leads to divorce. This interpretation makes the Lord's reasoning here flow seamlessly and directly on from His teaching in preceding verses about the root of sexual sin being in the mind. So the Lord is indeed saying that the Hillel school of thought- that divorce was possible for any trivial reason- was wrong. But as always, He moves the focus to a higher and more demanding level. He implies that "fornication" is the Biblical justification for divorce, but He says that actually it is the *logos*, the thought, of fornication which is the problem. And this is in line with what He has just been teaching about the thought and action of fornication being so closely connected.

Makes her commit adultery- There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. The man who commits adultery causes his ex-wife to commit adultery too, the Lord observed (Mt. 5:32). Her sin remains her sin, but he too is guilty. Prov. 5:15,16 (NIV) teach likewise: that a man should drink the waters of his own well, i.e. take sexual fulfilment from his own wife, otherwise his waters (i.e. the sexuality of his wife) will overflow into the streets for all and sundry. She will turn to other men due to his unfaithfulness. Sin thus has so many aspects.

And whoever shall marry a divorced woman commits adultery- The 'whosoever' earlier in this verse seems to refer to men who thought they could divorce their wife for any reason and go off with another woman. This view led women into sinful relationships with those men. But perhaps

what is in view in this part of the verse is the women who divorced their husbands for any reason- for women in some circles did have the power to divorce in the first century. The man who married such a woman was also committing adultery. The 'whosoever' refers to people who were getting divorced for any reason apart from fornication, and thereby leading both themselves and their new partners into sin.

5:33 *Again, you have heard that it was said to them of old: You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord*- This refers to perjury, i.e. lying about something in court. Perjury has a motive- e.g. simply lying about your age to a causal enquirer is not perjury, but it is perjury if you lie about your age in order to get old age retirement benefits. So we see the theme of *motive* being continued. But the Lord takes the matter further. He not only forbids false swearing but swearing at all- as if He foresaw that any oath is likely to end up a false oath, such is the weakness of humanity and our tendency not to be truthful. James 5:12 quotes this and says that "Above all" we should not swear falsely, lest we fall into condemnation. This is strong language. The implication is that if we lie in a human court, that is one thing- but that lie will be tried in the court of Heaven and will lead to condemnation.

5:34 *But I say to you: Swear not at all, neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God*- The Lord taught that His people were to be unconditionally truthful, because every untruthful word would be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:36). When He taught us 'swear not at all' (Mt. 5:33-37), He spoke specifically about not swearing by the judgment throne of God at Jerusalem. Jews and indeed all Semitic peoples were in the habit of swearing by the last day judgment, to prove that they were truthful (cp. Mt. 23:16-22). The Lord is saying that His people have no need to use those invocations and oaths- because they are to live *always* as if they are before the final judgment seat of God in Jerusalem. And therefore, our words will be true- because we live as men and women who stand constantly before His judgment presence. Swearing by "heaven" may refer to the temple; the "earth" of :35 would be the land of Israel.

5:35 *Nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet. Nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King*- The Jews, like many people, swore too easily. They thought that swearing by something greater than them was so acceptable that it actually excused them from basic truthfulness within their hearts. Their reasoning therefore was that they could lie about a matter because they judged they would never be found out; and swore by all manner of greater things to add credibility to their lie. This is the whole problem with religious structures of whatever kind; external things are invested with more authority and importance than the need for internal truth and spirituality. We see here the Lord's penetrating analysis of human psychology. The Lord clearly understood God as a personal being,

who was personally manifest in the earth / land of Israel and Jerusalem- despite their apostasy. Clearly God does not offer His fellowship only on the basis of purity, nor does He practice any sense of guilt by association.

5:36 *Neither shall you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black*- Starting with the greatest thing- the throne of God- down to the apparently most insignificant (one hair), the Lord shows that absolutely nothing (great or small) can give any more meaning to human words than the words themselves.

5:37 *But let your Yes mean Yes, and your No, No. For whatever is more than these comes from evil*- The AV and some manuscripts add "Let your communication be...". The word *logos* is used. The contrast is between 'swearing' in words, and having an internal *logos*, a thought behind the words, which is clear and honest. This continues the theme of 5:32 about the *logos* of fornication. We are to pay attention to our *logos* rather than merely the external word and action.
Yes, yes- People had the idea that there was normal language, and then oaths, which ensured that what you were saying was really true. The Lord is teaching that we should operate on only one level of language- absolute truth. We should not think that some areas of our language use can be less honest than others. The demand is for a total influence of God's truth into every aspect of human life and thinking.

Wrong words come *ek*, 'out of', evil or "the evil one". Yet the thrust of the Lord's teaching so far in the Sermon has been that wrong words and behaviour come *ek*, out of, the human heart and motivations. This, then, is 'the evil', personified as 'the evil one'. In using this term the Lord was radically redefining the popular conceptions of an external 'evil one' as an external being, teaching that it is the evil *logos* within the human heart which is the real 'evil one'. We note how deeply the Lord's teaching is concerned with internal thought processes. Whatever is more than a simple yes-no way of speaking involves something from 'the evil one'; and we weasel our way with words and meanings only when we are under temptation to be sinful. But that is a deeply internal, psychological situation, deep, deep within the human heart.

5:38 *You have heard that it was said: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth*- When the Lord Jesus gave His commandments as an elaboration of Moses' Law, that Law was still in force. He didn't say 'When I'm dead, this is how you should behave...'. He was showing us a higher level; but in the interim period until the Law was taken out of the way, He was opening up the *choice* of taking that higher level, even though making use of the concessions which Moses offered would not have been a sin during that period. Thus He spoke of not insisting on "an eye for an eye"; even though in certain rare cases the Law did allow for this. He was saying: 'You can keep Moses' Law, and take an eye for an eye. But there is a

higher level: to simply forgive'. And that in fact was inculcated by Moses' law itself.

5:39 *But I say to you: Do not resist him that is evil*- The Greek term for resisting evil occurs only in Eph. 6:13. We are in this life to arm ourselves spiritually, so that we may be able to resist in the evil day. If Paul is alluding to this part of the Sermon, the point would be that we are not to resist evil in this life, because our time to ultimately resist it will be in the last day. Then, along with the Lord Himself, we will resist and overcome evil through the establishment of the Kingdom on earth. Rom. 13:2 is likely another allusion to "resist not evil"- if we "resist" [s.w.] Governments whom God has put in power, then we are resisting God. This means that Paul fully understood that the 'powers that be' are indeed "evil", but they are not to be proactively 'resisted' by those in Christ. The time for that will come, but is not now. We are, however, to "resist the devil" (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). Surely "resist not evil" is in view. We are to resist sin within us, but not evil in its political form around us. Again, as so often in the Bible, we see that the focus for our spiritual struggle is within rather than without. As always in the Sermon, the example of Jesus was the making of the word into flesh. James 5:6 seems to make this point, by pointing out that Jesus did not and in a sense does not resist evil done against Him: "You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous one. He doesn't resist you". And yet He will judge this behaviour- not now, but at the last day.

But whoever hits you on your right cheek- You singular. Time and again the Sermon on the Mount / Plain seems to take a broad sweep in its record of the Lord's teaching to us all; and then He suddenly focuses in on the individual. The AV brings this out well through the use of "you" (plural) and "thee" (singular): "Blessed are you poor… love your enemies… to him who strikes thee on the cheek…". Note how many times there is this change of pronoun in Luke 6. Clearly the Lord wants us to see our collective standing before Him, and yet not to overlook the purely personal nature of His appeal to us individually.

Turn to him the other also- The Lord was smitten on the cheek but enquired why He was being smitten, rather than literally turning the other cheek. But to do this would be so humiliating for the aggressor that it would be a far more effective resistance of evil than anything else. The power in the confrontation is now with the one who turns the other cheek. S/he is calling the shots, not the beater. The idea of not resisting evil and offering the other cheek (Mt. 5:39) we normally apply to suffering loss from the world without fighting for our rights. Yet Paul took this as referring to the need to not retaliate to the harmful things done to us by members of the ecclesia (Rom. 12:16,17; 1 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 5:15).

When struck on the right cheek- which was a Semitic insult to a heretic- they were to not respond and open themselves up for further insult [surely a lesson for those brethren who are falsely accused of wrong beliefs]. And yet the compassion of Jesus shines through both His parables and the records of His words; as does His acceptance of people for who they were. People were relaxed with Him because they could see He had no hidden agenda. He wasn't going to use them for His own power trip.

5:40 *And if anyone wants to sue you and take away*- A rather liberal translation of the single Greek word *krino*. The idea is quite simply of judging. We can be wrongly judged by others without them taking us to court. The simple principle 'Do not resist wrong judgment of you' is a very large ask. Even in this life, truth often comes out. And if we believe in the ultimate justice of the final judgment, we will not for ever be going around correcting others' misjudgements and wrong impressions of us. That is something I have had to deeply learn in my own life.

Your coat, let him also have your cloak- It was forbidden by the Law to keep a man's outer garment overnight (Ex. 22:26,27). But the Lord taught *whilst the law was still in operation* that we should be willing to give it up, and even offer it (Mt. 5:40). The threatened man could have quoted the Law and kept his clothing. But the Lord bids us go to a higher level, beyond using God's law to uphold our own rights. And in this He raises a vital if difficult principle: Don't always enforce what Biblical rights you have against your brother. Don't rush to your own defence and justification even if Scripture is on your side. Live on the level of true love and non-resistance to evil. In this case the idea would be that even if someone amongst God's people does something unBiblical to us, clearly breaking God's laws, we are still to not resist evil but rather by our grace to them, shame them into repentance.

5:41 *And whoever shall compel you to go one mile, go with him two*- The Lord's high value of persons is reflected in how He taught His followers to not resist evil. A poor man had only two garments- an outer one, and an inner one (Dt. 24:10-13). Underneath that, he was naked. Yet the Lord taught that if you had your outer garment unjustly taken from you, then offer your abuser your undercloth. Offer him, in all seriousness, to take it off you, and leave you standing next to him arrystarkus. This would have turned the table. The abuser would be the one left ashamed, as he surely wouldn't do this. And thus the *dignity of the abused person was left intact at the end*. This was the Lord's desire. Likewise, Roman soldiers were allowed to impress a Jew to carry their pack for a mile, but they were liable to punishment if they made him carry it two miles. To offer to carry it the second mile would almost always be turned down by the abusive soldier. And again, at the end of the exchange, he would be the one

humiliated, and the Lord's follower, even though abused, would remain with head up and dignity intact.

5:42 *Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would*- Luke says that the Lord taught that we should "give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again" (Lk. 6:38). We might have expected Him to say: 'Give generously, with a good, running over measure, and this is what you will receive in return'. But He doesn't. He says simply "Give"; and then we will be given to in a generous measure, because with what measure we use in our giving, we will receive. Thinking it through, He means surely that "giving", by His definition, means a generous, well packed, abundant giving; for that *is* Christian giving. And note that the context of Lk. 6:38 is the Lord talking about not being critical and judgmental of others, but rather forgiving and accepting them. It is our 'giving' in this sense which is to be so full and generous. Only God's grace / giving can inspire this attitude within us, as we live hemmed in by the people of a materialistic, mean world, where nobody takes up a cross for anyone else. This is why Paul makes a play on the word 'grace' when writing to the Corinthians about giving; for *charis*, "grace", means 'giving'. He urges them to not receive God's grace in vain, but rather, motivated by it, to give grace to others (2 Cor. 6:1; 8:6,7,19).

Borrow from you- The Greek strictly means to borrow for interest. Seeing this was illegal under the Law of Moses, the Lord is saying that we should just lend- but not for interest. We would all soon bankrupt if we read this as it stands in many English translations. Or it could be that the Lord was aware that He was talking to extremely poor people who had so little to lend that it was not as hard for them to take Him seriously on this point as it is for those who have so much more.

According to Luke's record here, the Lord taught that we must love our enemies "and lend [in whatever way] never despairing" (Lk. 6:35 RV). The Lord sought to inculcate in His followers His same positive spirit. To never give up with people, for all the losses, the casualties, the hurt… never despairing of humanity. This was and is the spirit of Jesus.

5:43 *You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy*- The Lord's attitude to the Essenes is a case study in bridge building- developing what we have in common with our target audience, and yet through that commonality addressing the issues over which we differ. The Dead Sea scrolls reveal that the terms ""poor in spirit" and "poor" are technical terms used only by the Essenes to describe themselves". So when the Lord encouraged us to be "poor in

spirit" (Mt. 5:3), He was commending the Essene position. Likewise when He praised those who were eunuchs for God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:10-12), He was alluding to the Essenes, who were the only celibate group in 1st century Israel. And yet lepers were anathema to the Essenes, and the Lord's staying in the home of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3) was a purposeful affront to Essene thinking. The parable of the Good Samaritan has been seen as another purposeful attack upon them; likewise the Lord's teaching: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy" (Mt. 5:43). It was the Essenes in their *Rule Of The Community* who taught that Essenes must yearly chant curses upon their enemies. So the Lord even within Matthew 5, and certainly within His teaching as a whole, both commended and challenged the Essenes; His bridge building didn't involve just accepting their position.

5:44 *But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you-* Praying for our enemies and abusers, not wishing a curse upon them but rather a blessing, sounds like Job (Mt. 5:44 = Job 31:30). 'Blessing' has Biblical connection with the ideas of forgiveness and salvation. There would be no point in praying for forgiveness for the obviously impenitent unless God might actually grant it. This opens huge possibilities and potentials to us. God is willing to forgive people for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others (Mk. 2:5). Jesus isn't simply telling us to vaguely pray for our enemies because it is psychologically good for us and eases our pain a bit. Genuine prayer for abusers really has the possibility of being heard- for God is willing to save people for the sake of our prayers. Otherwise, this exhortation to do good to abusers through praying for their blessing would be rather meaningless. 'Cursing' likewise tended to carry the sense of 'May you be condemned at the day of judgment'. Those who condemn others will be condemned (Mt. 7:1 etc.)- and yet we can pray for their blessing. It is perhaps only our prayers and desire for their salvation which can over-ride the otherwise certain connection between condemning others and being condemned. This gives those condemned and abused by others so much work to do. In fact, so amazing are the possibilities that that alone is therapeutic. Moses' praying for Pharaoh in Ex. 9:28,29 is perhaps the Old Testament source of Christ's words. Let's not read those records as implying that Moses simply uttered a few words to God, and then each of the plagues was lifted. There was an element of real fervency in Moses' prayers- which may well be lacking in ours. This is surely an example of genuinely praying for our enemies.

Curse [condemn]... hate... despitefully use [slander]... persecute [chase out- excommunicate] the terms used here are very applicable to attitudes from some members of God's people to others- first century Israel, in the first context, and the Christian church in the longer term context. The

language is not to applicable to persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world. Likewise the commands to pray for spiritual blessing and acceptance of our abusers is surely more appropriate to prayers for those who are bitter misbelievers than for complete unbelievers who profess no desire to please God.

5:45 See on 6:26.
That you might be sons of your Father who is in heaven- Jesus juxtaposed ideas in a radical way. He spoke of drinking His blood; and of a Samaritan who was good, a spiritual hero. It was impossible for Jews to associate the term 'Samaritan' and the concept of being spiritually an example. And so the stark, radical challenge of the Lord's words must be allowed to come down into the 21st century too. Lk. 6:35 has Jesus speaking of "children of the Most High" and yet Mt. 5:45 has "children of your father". What did Jesus actually say? Perhaps: "Children of *abba*, daddy, the Most High". He juxtaposed His shocking idea of *abba* with the exalted title "the Most High". The Most High was in fact as close as *abba*, daddy, father.

For He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust- God consciously makes the sun rise each day- it isn't part of a kind of perpetual motion machine. Hence the force of His promises in the prophets that in the same way as He consciously maintains the solar system, so He will maintain His Israel. Ps. 104 is full of such examples: "He waters the hills... causes the grass to grow... makes darkness (consciously, each night)... the young lions... seek their meat from God... send forth Your Spirit (Angel), they are created" (not just by the reproductive system). There are important implications following from these ideas with regard to our faith in prayer. It seems to me that our belief that the world is going on inevitably by clockwork is one of the things which militates against faith. To give a simple example: we may need to catch a certain train which is to leave at 9 a.m. We wake up late at 8:30 a.m. and find it hard to have faith in our (all too hasty) prayer that we will get it, because we are accustomed to trains leaving on time. But if we have the necessary faith to believe that each individual action in life is the work of God, then it is not so hard to believe that God will make the action of that train leaving occur at 9:30 a.m. rather than at 9 a.m. when He normally makes it leave. The whole of creation keeps on going as a result of God having a heart that bleeds for people. “If he causes his heart to return unto himself”, the whole of creation would simply cease (Job 34:14 RVmg.). His spirit is His heart and mind, as well as physical power. Creation is kept going not by clockwork, but by the conscious outpouring of His Spirit toward us. In times of depression we need to remember this; that the very fact the world is still going, the planet still moves, atoms stay in their place and all matter still exists… is proof that the God who has a heart that bleeds for us is still there, with His heart going out to us His creation. And the spirit of the Father must be

in us His children.
Just because the Father gives His sun and rain to all without discrimination, we likewise should love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-45). This is the imperative of creation. We noted on 5:44 that our prayer and goodness to our enemies is in order to lead them to repentance and salvation. This is surely one motive behind the way God sends rain and sunshine upon the evil as well as the good. His goodness to them is intended to lead them to repentance. Only at the day of judgment will He execute judgment against them, and that is to be our perspective too. See on 5:39 *resist not evil*.

5:46 For *if you love them that love you*- We tend to love in response to others' love. But the love which the Lord has in mind is the love which is an act of the will, consciously effected towards the *un*loving.

What reward have you?- The idea is of wages. Whilst salvation itself is a free gift, in contrast to the wages paid by sin, this is not to say that there will not be some element of reward / wages / eternal recognition of our spiritual achievements in this life. The preceding verses have spoken of prayer and blessing for our abusers. This kind of attitude will be eternally rewarded. Not least if we see those we prayed for, those we blessed and forgave without their repentance, eternally with us in God's Kingdom. The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works.

Lk. 6:32 speaks of us having “thanks”. The Greek for "thank" in Lk. 6:32 is 'charis', normally translated "grace", and often connected with the help of the Spirit which is given to us in response to our own efforts. Taking responsibility for others is often thankless. Our human dysfunction cries out for recognition and affirmation, and we tend not to do those things for which we are not thanked. This is one of the most radical aspects of our calling as followers of Christ- to serve without being thanked. Belief in God’s judgment helps us with this. For all our works will be rewarded in some sense by Him at the last day. If we love those that love us, we have

no “thank”- but we will have “thank”, or “praise of God” ultimately. And this is what ultimately matters.

Even the tax collectors do the same- As demonstrated by the account of Zacchaeus, these were the most friendless people in society. Rejected by family, they were unloved by about everyone. The only person who would salute / greet them was a fellow publican (:47). The implication is that publicans [tax collectors] were loved only by themselves. Loving those who love us is little better than the selfish self-love of the lonely publican. Matthew was a publican and he surely had himself very much in view as he recounted this teaching of the Lord.

5:47 *And if you greet your brothers only, what do you more than they. The tax collectors do likewise*- "More" is, Gk., 'to super-abound'. This is a word characteristic of the new life in Christ. As God makes His grace *abound* to us, *we* are to *abound* to every good work (2 Cor. 9:8). We are to ‘abound’ in love to each other, as God abounds to us (1 Thess. 3:12). This is why there will never be a grudging spirit in those who serve properly motivated by God’s abundance to us. This super-abounding quality in our kindness, generosity, forgiveness etc. is a feature lacking in the unbelievers around us. If we salute our brethren only, then we do not super-abound (Mt. 5:47); if we love as the world loves its own, then we have missed the special quality of love which the Father and Son speak of and exemplify. This radical generosity of spirit to others is something which will mark us apart from this world.

5:48 See on 5:7.
You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect- We are either seen as absolutely perfect, or totally wicked, due to God's imputation of righteousness or evil to us (Ps. 37:37). There is no third way. The pure in heart see God, their righteousness (to God) exceeds that of the Pharisees, no part of their body offends them or they pluck it out; they are perfect as their Father is (Mt. 5:8,20,29,48). Every one of the faithful will have a body even now completely full of light, with no part dark (Lk. 11:36); we will walk, even as the Lord walked (1 Jn. 2:6). These impossible standards were surely designed by the Lord to force us towards a real faith in the imputed righteousness which we can glory in; that the Father really does see us as this righteous. Men have risen up to this. David at the end of his life could say that he was upright and had kept himself from his iniquity (2 Sam. 22:21-24). He could only say this by a clear understanding of the concept of imputed righteousness. Paul's claim to have always lived in a pure conscience must be seen in the same way.

God makes concessions to human weakness; He sets an ideal standard, but will accept us achieving a lower level. "Be ye therefore perfect, *as* your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) is proof enough of

this. The standard is clear: absolute perfection. But our lower attainment is accepted, by grace. If God accepts our obvious failure to attain an ideal standard, we should be inspired to accept this in others. Daily Israel were taught this; for they were to offer totally unblemished animals. And yet there was no totally unblemished animal. We need to recognize that God sets an ultimately high standard, but is prepared to accept our achievement of a lower standard- i.e. God makes concessions. We all disobey the same commandments of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Yet we have a firm hope in salvation. Therefore obedience to commandments is not the only necessity for salvation. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48) goes unfulfilled by each of us- as far as our own obedience is concerned. It is possible to disobey Christ's commandments every day and be saved. If this statement is false, then salvation is only possible is we attain God's moral perfection, which is impossible. If disobedience to Christ's commands is tolerable by God (on account of our faith in the atonement), how can *we* decide *which* of those commandments we will tolerate being broken by our brethren, and which of them we will disfellowship for? If we cannot recognize degrees of sin, it is difficult to pronounce some commands to be more important than others.

There are times when Paul's inspired commentary opens up some of the Lord's more difficult sayings. On "Be you therefore perfect", Paul's comment is: "Be perfected" (2 Cor. 13:11). This is quite different to how many may take it- 'Let God perfect you' is the message. Relatively late in his career Paul could comment: “Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect” (Phil. 3:12), alluding to the Lord’s bidding to be perfect as our Father is (Mt. 5:48). Through this allusion to the Gospels, Paul is showing his own admission of failure to live up to the standard set. And yet we must compare “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect" with “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect…” (Phil. 3:12,15). In 1 Cor. 13:10, he considers he is ‘perfect’, and has put away the things of childhood. Thus he saw his spiritual maturity only on account of his being in Christ; for he himself was not “already perfect”, he admitted.
Luke’s account has "be merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Quite simply, who God is should inspire us to be like Him; to copy His characteristics [the things of His Name] in our personalities. We must be "perfect" as our Father is; "be ye holy", because He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16); "kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave… be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Eph. 4:32; 5:1); "merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). Prov. 19:11RV uses language frequently applied to Yahweh Himself and applies it to the wise man: "The discretion of a man maketh him slow to anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression". And thus Phinehas was commended for being "jealous with my jealousy" (Num. 25:11 RV)-

his emotion at that time was a mirror of that of God Himself. Not only was language re-interpreted by the Christians. Whole concepts were reoriented. Holiness in the sense of separation from the unclean had been a major theme in the Mosaic Law, and it figured largely in the theology of the Pharisees. But the Lord quoted "Be holy because I, Yahweh your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2) as "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your father in heaven is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). To be merciful to those who sin is now the true holiness- not merely separation from them and condemnation of their ways. Note, too, how He invites us to interpret the Yahweh as "father", rather than transliterating the Name.

The Lord's manifesto as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount was structured and set up by Him in some ways as a 'new law' as opposed to the old law of Moses. And yet His law likewise proves impossible to keep. We cannot be perfect as our Father is. To a man and to a woman, we would admit that we cannot fully forgive our enemies from our hearts. And so, according to the Lord's law, we each stand unforgiven. We are to sell all that we have and give to the poor, or risk forfeiting the Kingdom because of our love of this world's goods (Mk. 10:17-22). An angry thought is murder, a passing lustful look becomes adultery- all mortal sins, which catch each of us within their net. Why was this? Surely yet again, the Lord wished to convict us of our guilt before Him, our inabilities, our desperation… so that we could come to appreciate the wonder of His character and His saving grace. For He was the one and only embodiment of His own teaching, to the point that the person who fulfilled all His teaching was in fact He Himself- and no other man. In knowing Him, we thus know our own desperation, and yet we likewise know- because we know Him- the certainty of our salvation by grace. Further, it becomes apparent that the Lord accepted with open arms those who were so very far from the ideals He laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. He convicted them of their guilt in such a way that with joy and peace they ran to His grace.

CHAPTER 6

6:1 *Take heed you do not do your good deeds*- Gk. 'to hold the mind towards'. Again and again, the Lord's emphasis is upon the innermost functioning of the mind and thought processes. For to be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity.

Before men, to be seen by them- The same Greek phrase is used in Mt. 23:5 about the Pharisees doing all their works motivated by this desire to be seen of men. What we do *unseen* by men is therefore the litmus test of our love and Christianity. We should almost have an obsession about doing good works unseen by men- we must "take heed", consciously set our mind, to do unseen acts of kindness to others. Because the "reward", the nature of our eternity, will depend on these things.

Else you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven- Salvation is by grace, but the 'reward' will be in terms of how the *nature* of our eternal existence reflects good things done in this life. The Greek word for 'reward' is quite common in the Sermon, and the first usage of it suggests that the reward is given in Heaven right now (Mt. 5:12 "great *is* your reward in Heaven", s.w. Jn. 4:36 "he that reaps receives wages / reward, and gathers fruit unto life eternal"; Mt. 5:46; 6:1,2,5,16). Yet the Lord comes from Heaven to give us the rewards after we have been resurrected at the last day (Mt. 20:8; Rev. 11:18; 22:12). So if we will be given an eternal reward for our works, it follows that there is a recompense for us noted in the books of Heaven at the very point we do the good deed. But there will be no such recompense for things which are openly seen of men, or anything which is consciously done so as to be seen by men. In the reality of life, the hardest thing about good deeds is when we sense nobody appreciates us, that we are holding the fort alone, that we have no recognition. On one hand, recognition for labour is hugely important to our basic psychological makeup- and employers have all come to realize that. It is only by appreciating the principle of eternal blessing for being *u*nrecognized that we can live the way Jesus asks of us. It is my observation in the life of believers that often the Lord's most zealous servants are marginalized, falsely accused, rejected from churches etc. The Lord's teaching here makes perfect sense of that phenomenon. He wants them to continue their service in a way which will be eternally recognized, and He wants to ensure their motives for their good works are not in order to be seen of men. Therefore He allows them to be marginalized. So that their works may be totally sincere, and receive an eternal recognition. It is also the case that when serving others, we reflect that nobody realized all the host of planning and frustrations which went into one good deed. A plan to visit someone in

hospital may involve struggles with public transport, getting lost on the way, forgetting our telephone, being late home which meant we missed something important... and so forth. It is all those good deeds which others don't see. They 'see' only that we spent 15 minutes in a hospital visiting someone. But those other components to the good deed of the 15 minutes are all carefully logged with the Lord.

6:2 *When therefore you do alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets*- The reference may be to the bronze collection 'trumpet' into which the wealthy loudly poured large numbers of pennies. Remember that Jesus was addressing His sermon to the illiterate and desperately poor. There was little likelihood they would ever do this. So we are to understand the Lord as making a warning out of those wealthy people- to all of us, in whatever context, great or small, to not advertise our kindnesses, and to not be motivated to it by the thought of what others would think of it.

That they may have glory from men - Perhaps the emphasis is upon "they". Our good works are to be so that "men" give glory to *God* (Mt. 5:16). To have any intention of attracting glory to ourselves is therefore to play God. For all glory is to go to Him.

Truly I say to you, they have received their reward- The Greek translated "have" means both to receive fully, and intransitively, 'to keep away'. They get their full reward now, so they are keeping themselves away from any future reward at the last day. According to the allusion here in 1 Tim. 4:8, the implication is that we aren't to take Mt. 6:2,3 ("they have their reward") as implying that we have *no* reward in this life. We do (cp. Mt. 19:29).

6:3 *But when you do alms*- The Lord Jesus was addressing the very poorest in society. And yet He assumed they would do some good and show some generosity to others. We can too easily dismiss Bible teaching about generosity and assume it applies to the rich, or at least, not to me. Yet the Lord's implication is that every single person can give and be generous in some way. The Lord speaks here of "*when*" you give, rather than *if* you give. He took giving to others in need as being a basic, intrinsic part of life in Him.

Do not let your left hand know what your right hand does- There had developed a strong Jewish tradition that the right hand side of a man was his spiritual side, and the left hand side was the equivalent of the New Testament 'devil'. The Lord Jesus referred to this understanding when He warned: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Mt.

6:3)- implying that the good deeds of the spiritual man would be misused by the 'devil', e.g. in using them as grounds for spiritual pride.

The idea perhaps is that our good deeds should not be done consciously, we hardly know ourselves that we are doing them. The Lord taught just the same when He portrayed the faithful at the last day almost arguing back with their Lord before His judgment seat, totally denying they had done the good deeds which He was now rewarding them for ("when did we see You...", Mt. 25:39).

6:4 *That your alms may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret shall reward you*- as if God is especially manifest in Christ when we stand before him in judgment to receive our rewards openly. Our prayers "in secret" will be 'rewarded' "openly"; but the language of 'open reward' is used by the Lord in reference to the judgment: "For the son of man shall come in the glory of his father with his angels; and then he shall reward [s.w.] every man" (Mt. 16:27). In that day the workers will be 'rewarded' for their work (s.w. Mt. 20:8; Rom. 2:6; 2 Tim. 4:8; Rev. 22:12); yet Mt. 6:4-6 says they will be rewarded for their prayers. Prayer will only ultimately be answered when the Lord returns; hence Mt. 6:4-6 leads on to the Lord's prayer, with its emphasis upon requesting the coming of the Kingdom, forgiveness etc. rather than petty human requests. Here again we see a connection between prayer and the final judgment.

Giving alms should be so secret, according to our suggestion on 6:3, that we ourselves are not even fully conscious of them. There is repeated emphasis that what is in secret, concealed from view, will be openly rewarded (Mt. 6:6,18; Lk. 12:2). The day of judgment will be a judging of the secret things (Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 4:5). Absolutely nothing that is now hid shall not then be made open- this is a considerable theme in the Lord's teaching (Mt. 10:26; Mk. 4:22; Lk. 8:17; 12:2). The Lord's own journey to die at Jerusalem was done 'in secret'- as so often, He spoke His teaching to Himself (Jn. 7:10). The need for a sense of significance, reward and recognition to be attached to our works is basic to the structure of human personality. We're not asked to deny this, to live as if we are more or less than human. We're asked instead to realize that the day for that shall come, but it is not now, nor are we to seek it now from the eyes of men.

The public dimension to the judgment process [AV "openly"] will mean that somehow in a moment we will know 'the secret things' of each other. Only with that basis of understanding could believers who appear to differ in this life live eternally together.

6:5 *And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have received*

their reward- The same Greek word for "seen of men" occurs in 6:16,18 (AV "to appear"). Doing spiritual things for the sake of external appearance was clearly a particular concern of the Lord Jesus. Church life inevitably leads to temptations in this area- mixing with the same people regularly, with families intermarrying over the years, appearance becomes a great temptation. But having this as a motivation for any act of spirituality is so abhorrent to the Lord.

6:6 *But you, when you pray, enter into your room and shut your door, pray to your Father who is unseen*- The Lord taught the intensity of the life He required by taking Old Testament passages which refer to the crisis of the last days, and applying them to the daily life of His people. Take Is. 26:20, which speaks of how in the final tribulation, God's people will shut the doors around them and pray. The Lord applies this to the daily, regular prayer of His people- we are to pray in secret, in our room, with doors closed (Mt. 6:6)- clearly an allusion to the Isaiah passage. In the time of Elisha we read that when a problem arose, the people concerned went indoors and shut the door. Going inside and shutting the door is associated with prayer, both by the Lord (Mt. 6:6) and Elisha himself (2 Kings 4:33). The other instances of shutting the door don't involve prayer, but they involve obediently doing something in faith- the woman shut the door upon her sons and poured out the oil in faith; she shut the door upon her sick son (2 Kings 4:5,21). Perhaps the implication is that what she did in faith and hope was read by God as prayer, even though she didn't apparently verbalize anything. The widow woman shut the door and started to pour out the oil into the vessels (2 Kings 4:5); the way the Lord alludes to this implies that she prayed before she started pouring, and yet she was sure already that it would happen (Mt. 6:6). This should inspire a spirit of soberness in our prayers.

And your Father who sees in secret shall reward you- We should be saying and expressing things to God which are our most intense, essential, personal feelings. We cannot, therefore, easily use trite, stock phrases in our personal prayers. Note the grammatically needless repetition of the personal pronoun in Mt. 6:6: "You, when *you* pray, enter into *your* closet, and when *you* have shut *your* door, pray to *your* Father, which is in secret; and *your* Father who sees in secret shall reward *you* openly". Likewise when reading the Psalms, especially 71, note how many times David addresses God with the personal pronoun: thee, thy, thou… it really is a personal relationship.

6:7 *And in praying do not use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking*- We will not use "vain repetitions" (Mt. 6:7); the Greek means literally 'to stutter / stammer with the *logos*'. We know what the man with a chronic stammer is trying to say before he actually finishes saying it. To hear him saying

the same syllables again and again is a frustration for us. It's a telling way of putting it. God knows our need before we ask (Mt. 6:8). Say it, if we have to be explicit, and mean what we ask. And leave it there. 'Don't keep stammering on in your prayers' is to be connected with what comes a bit later: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek)... but seek (i.e. pray for, Is. 55:16) the Kingdom of God, and His (imputed) righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:31-33). We are not merely to believe that what we ask for we will receive. Note how again the word *logos* occurs; we commented several times in chapter 5 that this is a core idea in the Sermon. Our innermost thought and intention is of the essence.

6:8 *Therefore, do not be like them! Even before you ask Him, your Father knows* - This gives a profound insight into the purpose of prayer. Prayer is not in order to inform God of human need. He knows all things, and He knows every human need. So if prayer is not in order to inform God of anything, what is it for? Ultimately, it is for our benefit. Keeping on and on repeating our perceived needs, repeating them vainly, as if we are endlessly stuttering, is actually a form of selfishness. Prayer is to be about dialogue with God, sharing life with Him, confession, sharing thoughts. An analysis of David's prayers as recorded in the book of Psalms shows that only about 5% of the verses are requests for anything material. The rest is simply talking with God. The idea of prayer as a mindless repetition of specific needs, in the belief that the more times we state them, the more likely God is to respond- is the very opposite of the kind of prayer which God intends. The Lord's model prayer which He goes on to give features only one request for anything material- and that is simply a request that God gives us enough food for today.

The Kingdom prophecy that "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Is. 65:24) is applied to us *now* (Mt. 6:8)- as if answered prayer is a foretaste of the Kingdom life.

What things you need- The hope of the future Kingdom means that we will not now be materialistic. It will give us strength against materialism. And the model prayer was given by Jesus in the context of His comment on how some tend to always be asking God for material things. The Lord teaches that the paramount thing we should request is the coming of the Kingdom, and our forgiveness so that we might partake in it. *This* is the request we should be making- for "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of… after *this* manner therefore pray ye…" (Mt. 6:9,10). Later in Mt. 6 the Lord repeats the same words: "Your heavenly Father *knoweth that ye have need of all these things*… seek ye first his Kingdom" (Mt. 6:32-34 RV). The structure of the Lord's prayer reflects this- for the first and only request in it is a seeking for the coming of His Kingdom. The RV

of Heb. 10:34,35 brings out well the same theme: " Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your *possessions*, knowing that ye have your own selves for a better *possession*" (RVmg). Having warned against materialism, the Lord bids His men to "rather seek ye the Kingdom of God... it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:31,32) in the place of seeking for material things. The more we grasp that it really is God's will that we will be there, the more strength we will have to resist seeking for material things in this life. By being sure that we will be there, the Kingdom becomes our treasure, where our heart is, rather than any material treasure in this life (Lk. 9:34).

6:9 *In this manner you should pray*- The model prayer given by the Lord can of course be used just as it is. But it's worth noting that the Lord's own subsequent prayers, and some of Paul, repeated the essence of some of the phrases in it, but in different words. This may be a useful pattern for us in learning how to formulate prayers. The prayer of Jesus in Jn. 17 is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

Our Father- The model prayer begins with the words "Our Father". Straight away we are bidden remember that no man is an island; the Lord intended us to be aware of the entire community of believers in our private prayers. "Give us this day *our* daily bread" may appear hard for comfortably off Christians to pray- until they grasp that they are praying for "our" daily bread, not "my" daily bread. There are so many in the brotherhood for whom having daily bread is indeed a constantly uncertain question. We should be aware of the whole brotherhood; and pray that "we" will be given our bread for today.

Who is in Heaven- A feature of Biblical prayers is the way they start with some reference to God, often involving several clauses. We are to firstly visualize Him there. This is to be connected with the idea of lifting the eyes to Heaven at the start of a prayer (Ps. 121:1; 123:1; Ez. 23:27; Dan. 4:34; Lk. 16:23; 18:13; Jn. 11:41; 17:1). "God *is in Heaven*, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few (more often translated "little")" (Ecc. 5:2). Ezra, Nehemiah and Solomon all start their major prayers with a reference to the fact that God really *is* there in Heaven. The fact that God is a material, corporeal being is vital here. The very fact God has a spatial location, in Heaven, with Christ at His right hand,

indicates of itself that God is a physical rather than purely spiritual being. The fact Christ really is there, seated at God's right hand interceding for us, was a concept which filled Paul's thinking (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2 cp. 1 Pet. 3:22). This teaching about our having a *Heavenly* Father may appear quite painless to accept; but it was radical, demanding stuff in the first century. The family then was "the centrally located institution maintaining societal existence… it [was] the primary focus of personal loyalty and it [held] supreme sway over individual life". "Our father, *who is in Heaven*" was a prayer hard to pray if one really accepted the full import of the words; every bit as much as it is today. The idea of belonging to another family, of which the invisible Lord Jesus in Heaven was the head, belonging to a new society of world-wide brothers and sisters, where the Lord from Heaven held "supreme sway over individual life", was radical indeed. It took huge commitment and a deep faith in this invisible head of the new family to step out from ones existing family. And the call of Christ is no less radical today. The social circle at uni, the guys at work, our unbelieving family members… now all take a radical second place to our precious family in Christ. And yet we so easily abuse or disregard the importance of our spiritual family; we too easily exclude them, won't meet with them, can't be bothered about them.

Let Your Name be glorified- "Hallowed / sanctified be Your name" uses an aorist tense which implies that it will be accomplished as a one-time act; at the coming of the Lord. Indeed, the aorist tenses in the Lord's model prayer are arresting; each phrase of the prayer asks for something to be done in a one-time sense. This alone suggests an intended 'answer' in terms of the final establishment of the Kingdom. "Hallowed be Your Name" was actually one of the Eighteen Benedictions used by most Jews at the time. This common phrase was consciously seen as a reference to the YHWH Name (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 76). But the Lord purposefully juxtaposes *Abba*, "Father", with that phrase. This Aramaic, non-Hebrew, familiar word, an equivalent of "Daddy!", is placed by the Lord next to Judaism's most well-known and frequently used blessing of the YHWH Name. By doing so, He was making the Name even more hallowed and glorious- by showing that the essence of that Name speaks of familiar family relationship with us, and is no longer the carefully guarded preserve of Hebrew people, thought, culture and language.

The Lord prayed this in Gethsemane; and it took Him so long to say these words that the disciples fell asleep.

6:10 *Your Kingdom come*- Greek scholars have pointed out that some phrases in the Lord's prayer show a remarkable lack of etiquette and the usual language of petition to a superior; literally, the text reads: "Come

Your Kingdom, done Your will". Is this part of the "boldness" in approaching God which the NT speaks of? That God should encourage us in this (although He also encourages us in reverential fear of Him) reflects something of His humility. The Kingdom of God refers to that over which God reigns. We are "a colony of Heaven" in our response to His principles (Phil. 3:20 Moffat). We are to pray for His Kingdom to come, so that His will may be done on earth (Mt. 6:10). The Kingdom and the doing of His will are therefore paralleled. His Kingdom reigns over all in Heaven, for there, all the Angels are obedient to Him (Ps. 103:19-21). By praying for the Kingdom to come on earth we are not only praying for the Lord's second coming, but for the progress of the Gospel world-wide right now. Not only that more men and women will hear it and respond, but that those who have accepted it might work God's will rather than their own to an ever greater extent. Whether or not we can physically spread the Gospel is in this sense irrelevant; our prayer should be, first and foremost if the pattern of the Lord's prayer is to be taken exactly, for the triumph of the Gospel world-wide. It has been pointed out by Philip Yancey that "Thy Kingdom come!" was violently in conflict with the Roman view that the lives of a subject people like Israel belonged to Caesar's kingdom.

"'Your kingdom come!' is therefore a word of defiance; to pray it is a subversive activity. This is also how the authorities understand the ministry of Jesus: it is subversive and not to be tolerated" (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew* (Harper Collins, 1998). The word *basileia* translated "Kingdom" definitely brought to mind the imperial reign or empire of Rome. Thus Hal Taussig comments: "Whenever anyone in Jesus' time used the term "basileia", the first thing people thought of was the Roman "kingdom" or "empire". That is, "basileia" really meant "Roman empire" to most people who heard it… It was to many ears a direct insult to the Roman empire. Uttered in the presence of Roman soldiers, such a prayer could have gotten [a person] in immediate trouble" (Hal Taussig, *op cit* pp. 21,96). And so with us, the seeking of the future Kingdom is a radical denial of the spirit of our age, which seeks its Kingdom now; it demands a separation from the world around us. The well-known description of the Kingdom in Is. 2:1-4 is in the context of appealing to Israel to change their ways. Because they would *then* walk in the ways of the Lord, therefore "O house of Israel [therefore] Come ye [now] and walk in the ways of the Lord" (2:5). The hope of Israel ought to motivate Israel to live the Kingdom life here and now.

*Your will be done- A*gain using an aorist which demands a one-time fulfilment- in the sense of 'May Your will come about...'. The will of God is often associated with His ultimate plan of salvation (e.g. Eph. 1:5-12; Col. 1:20). It has been pointed out that "Hallowed be Your Name" is (grammatically) a request for action, rather than simply an expression of praise. Jesus prayed this in Gethsemane and it cost Him His life. We know from the Old Testament that God in fact "hallows" His own Name (Ez.

20:41; 28:25; 36:22,23; 38:16; 39:27). By asking God to "hallow" or sanctify / realize that Name in our lives, we are definitely praying in accordance with His will. He wishes to do this- and so He will surely do this in our lives if we ask Him. All the principles connected with His Name will be articulated in our lives and experience for sure if we pray for this- for we will be praying according to His revealed will in His word. And the ultimate fulfilment of all this will be in final coming of the Kingdom. But see on 7:21.
In interpreting the Sermon on the Mount, we need to look for similar phrases within the Sermon in order to grasp the sense the Lord was seeking to develop. And we have just such a connection of though here when we observe that the Sermon concludes with an appeal to 'do the will of My Father' (7:21; and the theme continues in the Lord's teaching, e.g. Mt. 12:50; 21:31; Lk. 12:47). We are praying therefore not only for Christ's return when the literal coming of the Kingdom on earth will mean that God's will shall be done on earth. We are asking for the principles of God's rulership / Kingdom over men (as outlined in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) to be manifested in our lives; and for strength to do God's will on earth here and now. In probing deeper how the Lord understood the Father's will, we find the term specifically and repeatedly linked with the salvation of persons, supremely enabled through the Lord's death (Mt. 18:14; Jn. 6:39,40; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:5). We would therefore be justified in seeing this request for the Kingdom to come and [in parallel] God's will to be done as a request for the successful spreading of the Gospel worldwide (see note on "in earth" below). The coming of the Kingdom and the doing of God's will are in parallel- the coming of the Kingship of God in human life means that humans do God's will as taught by the Lord in the Sermon. Of course, the final physical coming of the Kingdom is also in view, but that is the final manifestation of the process which is now ongoing in human hearts. This more internal, spiritual interpretation of the coming of the Kingdom would be in line with the rest of the Sermon, which emphasizes the rule of Divine principles in the deepest parts of the human heart.

This phrase occurs verbatim on the Lord's lips when He Himself prayed in Gethsemane "Your will be done" (Mt. 26:42). So often we find the Lord Himself being the embodiment of His own teaching in the Sermon. The difficulty with which the Lord said those words shows how hard it is to really pray 'the Lord's prayer'. The way it can be rattled off so quickly is tragic.

On earth as it is in Heaven- Gk. *epi* the earth, as the will of God is now done in (Gk. *en*) Heaven. *Epi* in this context has the sense of being spread throughout; whereas *en* more simply and directly means "in". Is there a hint here that we are to be praying for the success of the geographical spreading of the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the earth? Not just knowledge of that Gospel, but people actually submitting

to God's Kingship and living by Kingdom principles; not just baptisms but transformed lives. By doing God's will as it is now done in Heaven, we are developing outposts of God's Heavenly Kingdom here on earth, and this will come to term in the return of Christ and the more physical establishment of the Kingdom on the planet, the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, in every fibre of earthly existence.

6:11 *Give us this day our daily bread*- This has long been recognized as an inadequate translation of a very strange Greek phrase. The adjective *epiousios* in "our daily bread" is one example of Christ's radical use of language; there in the midst of the prayer which the Lord bid His followers constantly use, was a word which was virtually unknown to them. Our bread only-for-this-day was the idea; the word is used for the rations of soldiers. The idea is 'Give us today, right now, the bread / food of tomorrow'. In ancient Judaism, *mahar* means not only tomorrow but the great Tomorrow, i.e. the Kingdom. Jesus spoke of the inauguration of the future Kingdom in terms of eating food together (Mt. 8:11; Lk. 6:21; 14:15; 22:29,30; Rev. 7:16). 'Give us the future Kingdom today, may it come right now' is perhaps one of the levels on which He intended us to understand the prayer. The aorist implies: 'Give us this once and final time' the bread of tomorrow. The Lord was surely alluding to the way that Israel in the wilderness had been told that "in the morning [tomorrow] you shall be filled with bread"; and this was widely understood in first century Palestine as being typical of the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. Notice too how Is. 55:10 connects the descent of God's word made flesh in Jesus, with the giving of bread. And one practical point. Even though we may have daily bread, we are still to pray for it. It's rather like Zech. 10:1: "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain"; even when it's the season, still ask Him for what it appears you naturally already have. Israel were fed with manna one day at a time- this is so stressed (Ex. 16:4,19,20).

The idea of 'daily bread' recalls the gift of manna. There was to be no hoarding of manna- anything extra was to be shared with others (Ex. 16:8; 2 Cor. 8:15). But we live in a world where the financial challenges of retirement, housing, small family size [if any family at all]... mean that there appears no other option but to 'hoard manna' for the future. To some extent this may be a reflection of the way that life in these very last days is indeed quite different to anything previously known in history; but all the same, we face a very real challenge. Are we going to hoard manna, for our retirement, for our unknown futures? Or will we rise up to the challenge to trust in God's day by day provision, and share what's left over? "Give us this day our bread-for-today" really needs to be prayed by us daily. Let's give full weight to the Lord's command to pray for only "our daily bread", the daily rations granted to a soldier on active duty. It's almost impossible to translate this term adequately in English. In the former USSR and Communist East Germany (DDR), there was the idea

that nobody in a Socialist state should go hungry. And so if you were hungry in a restaurant after eating, you had the right to ask for some food, beyond what you paid for. In the former East Germany, the term *Sättigungsbeilage* was used for this in restaurants- the portion of necessity. It's this food we should ask God for- the food to keep us alive, the food which a Socialist restaurant would give you for free. We shouldn't be thinking in terms of anything more than this. It's an eloquent essay in what our attitude to wealth, materialism and long term self-provision ought to be.

To steal is to take the Name of Yahweh called upon us in vain (Prov. 30:9), and therefore we ask to be given *only* our daily bread and no more (NIV); not so much that if we are found out, the Name will be brought into disrepute, but rather that we personally will have blasphemed the imperative of Yahweh which is heavy upon us; these words of Agur are applied to us in Mt. 6:11.

6:12 *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*- Probably an allusion to the jubilee. We release / forgive men their debt to us, as God does to us. If we chose not to participate in this Jubilee by not releasing others, then we cannot expect to receive it ourselves (note the Jubilee allusions in Lk. 24:47). Around 90% of Old Testament references to sin use the metaphor of a weight or burden, which can be lifted by forgiveness. The Lord Jesus prefers to speak of sin as a debt, which can be forgiven by not being demanded and the debt erased. The metaphor of debt is somewhat richer than that or burdens. It opens the possibility that God lent to us, that He allowed us to get into that debt- because He didn't strike us dead for the sin. 'Debt' also carries with it the idea that we would like to repay, but cannot. This is the flavour of the Lord's opening to the Sermon- that He is the solution for those who would like to be spiritual but feel unable to be as they would wish to be (see on 5:6). The release of debt carries with it a greater sense of gratitude, knowing that we should not have got into the debt in the first place. All this was foreseen by the Lord in His change of metaphor from sin as weight to sin as debt. It has been noted that sin was not spoken as debt until Jesus introduced the idea. We are in debt to God. And yet so many have the idea that God owes them, and big time. The prayer of Apollonius of Tyana was that "Oye gods, give me the things which are owing to me". And that ancient attitude is alive today, leading to some who think it is their right not to work and to be supported, or expect some kind of material blessing from God. When actually, we are in deep debt to God, and forgiven it only by pure grace.

Those "indebted" to us (Lk. 11:4) are those who have a debt to us. But Biblically, who are those who are 'indebted'? The same Greek word occurs often in the New Testament. Mt. 18:30 explains that there is a debt to us

if we have been sinned against and it's not been reconciled. The debt our brethren have to us, and we to them, is to love one another, to lay our lives down for each other, to entertain and receive each other at home (s.w. 3 Jn. 8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:11). A wife has her husband in her debt if he doesn't love her with the love of Christ (Eph. 5:28); our brethren are in debt to us if they don't give us material help when we truly need it (Rom. 15:27); or if they don't wash our feet (Jn. 13:14). A debt implies that it's not been paid; and so I come to the conclusion that the *forgiveness* of our debtors is forgiving our brethren when they don't love us as they should, don't care for us… and never apologize or rectify it. The debt is outstanding; they've not cleared it. But we are to forgive it; we are to forgive unconditionally, without demanding restoration or grovelling repentance before us. This is the challenge of that phrase in the Lord's prayer. For we ask for "our sins" in general to be likewise forgiven; and they surely include many 'secret sins' which we don't even perceive or haven't repented of. And further. "As we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Lk. 11:4) can actually be read as a word of command, a statement that is actually a request. The request is that the sins of those who've sinned against us be forgiven- in this sense, "whosesoever sins ye remit [s.w. forgive] they are remitted unto them" (Jn. 20:23). That's another challenging thought. If they're impenitent, how can they be forgiven? But if *we* forgive them, perhaps we are to understand that God is happy to forgive them. If we feel, as I do, that we've been sinned against so much… then we have a wonderful opportunity to gain our own forgiveness and even that of those people… by forgiving them. The more I hurt at how others have treated me, the more I realize my own desperate need for forgiveness. The two things, as the Lord foresaw in His model prayer, dovetail seamlessly together.
Further evidence that Jesus prayed in Aramaic is found by comparing the two records of the Lord's prayer; Matthew has "forgive us our debts", whilst Luke has "forgive us our sins". The Aramaic word *hobha* means both 'sin' and 'debt'. The conclusion is therefore that Jesus taught the disciples to pray in their native Aramaic dialect rather than in Hebrew or Greek. Further, the Lord's prayer has many links to the *Kaddish*, an ancient Aramaic prayer which included phrases like "Exalted and hallowed be his great name... may he let his kingdom rule... speedily and soon".

"As we*...*" is a challenge. The crucial little Greek word *hos* is elsewhere translated: according as, as soon as, even as, like as, as greatly as, since, whenever, while. Clearly enough, our forgiveness by God is dependent upon and of the same nature as our forgiveness of others.

"Forgive us our / debts sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us" (Lk.) again uses the aorist which implies 'Forgive us this once'. Could this not be an anticipation of the state of the believer before the judgment seat of Christ- 'forgive me please this once for all my sins, as I have forgiven those who sinned against me'. If so, we have a powerful

exhortation to forgive *now*; for in that awesome moment, it will be so apparent that the Lord's gracious acceptance of us will be directly proportional to how deeply we accepted and forgave our brethren in this life. Notice how strongly Jesus links future judgment with our present forgiveness (Lk. 6:37). He teaches us to pray now for forgiveness on the basis of how we have forgiven others, knowing that in prayer, we have a foretaste of the judgment. Now we can come boldly before the throne of grace in prayer, just as we will come before that same throne in the last day.

6:13 *And lead us not*- The Greek *eisphero* definitely means to lead inward. The internal process of temptation is in view here, as explained specifically by James 1:13-15- which may be a specific comment on this part of the Sermon. Much of James is an expansion upon the Sermon. Whilst the process of temptation is internal (and note how internal processes are the great theme of the Sermon), God is capable of leading a person in the process. The dynamics in the upward and downward spirals are ultimately of God.

Into temptation but deliver us from evil- This can only really come true when we are changed into divine nature; for only then will we be freed /delivered [aorist- once, finally, for all time] from the 'devil' of sin. The word for trial / temptation is *peirasmos*, and I have never been entirely satisfied that we can reconcile the Lord's words here with the fact that God does not tempt any man (James 1:13-15). However, I feel happier with the idea that the Lord may specifically be bidding us pray for deliverance from the latter day holocaust to come upon the saints. The Lord Jesus can keep us from "the hour of trial [*peirasmos*] which is coming on the whole world" (Rev. 3:10). When the disciples were bidden pray that they enter not into temptation (Mk. 14:38- *peirasmos* again), they were being asked to pray the model prayer with passionate concentration and meaning. Yet those men in Gethsemane were and are representative of the latter day saints who are bidden pray that they may escape "all those things", the hour of trial /*peirasmos* which is coming, and to stand acceptably before the Son of man at His coming. We ought to be praying fervently for this deliverance; but I wonder how many of us are? For the days of the final tribulation will be shortened for the sake of the elect- i.e., for the sake of their prayers (Mk. 13:19,20). The final tribulation of the last days will be the supreme struggle between the flesh and spirit, between the believer and the world, between Christ and the Biblical 'devil'; and we are to pray that we will be delivered victorious from that struggle. Thus "Lead us not into 'the test'" (Mt. 6:13) could in this context be understood as a plea to save us from entering into the time of final tribulation- just as the Lord specifically exhorts us to pray to be delivered from that time. The implication would be that the final time of testing will be so severe that indeed the elect will scarcely be saved. It seems to me that none of us have the urgent sense of the time of testing

ahead which we should have; how many are praying daily to be spared it? How many are in actual denial that it will ever come, even though it's clear enough in Scripture?

We must pray not to be led into temptation (Mt. 6:13); but when we fall into such temptation (s.w.), count it all joy, James says (1:2). The exercise of praying not to experience those temptations was for our spiritual benefit, and God is willing that it should be so.

"Deliver us from evil" is surely alluded to in 2 Pet. 2:9 "The Lord knows how to *deliver* the Godly out of temptations". Evil and temptation are thereby paralleled.

The Lord Jesus based this part of His prayer on Old Testament passages like 1 Chron. 4:10; Ps. 25:22; 26:11; 31:8; 34:22; 69:18; 78:35,42; 140:1 and Prov. 2:12; 6:24, which ask for 'deliverance' from evil *people*, sin, distress, tribulation etc. here on earth. Not one of those passages speaks of deliverance from a personal, superhuman Satan. Esther's prayer in Es. 4:19 LXX is very similar – "Deliver us from the hand of the evildoer", but that 'evildoer' was Haman, not any personal, superhuman Satan. Even if we insist upon reading 'the evil one', "the evil one" in the Old Testament was always "the evil man in Israel" (Dt. 17:12; 19:19; 22:21–24 cp. 1 Cor. 5:13) – never a superhuman being. And there may be another allusion by the Lord to Gen. 48:16, where God is called the One "who has redeemed me from all evil". As the Old Testament 'word made flesh', the thinking of the Lord Jesus was constantly reflective of Old Testament passages; but in every case here, the passages He alluded to were *not* concerning a superhuman Devil figure. God 'delivers from' "every trouble" (Ps. 54:7), persecutors and enemies (Ps. 142:6; 69:14) – but as Ernst Lohmeyer notes, "There is no instance of the [orthodox understanding of the] Devil being called 'the evil one' in the Old Testament or in the Jewish writings" (Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, translated by John Bowden (London: Collins, 1965) p. 214).

It's been observed that every aspect of the Lord's prayer can be interpreted with reference to the future coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. Prayer for deliverance from evil, the time of testing (Gk.), would then tally well with the Lord's exhortation to pray that we may be delivered from the final time of evil coming on the earth (Lk. 21:36). Another insight into this petition is that God does in fact lead men in a downward spiral as well as in an upward spiral of relationship with Him – Pharaoh would be the classic example. "Why do you make us err from your ways?" was the lament of Israel to their God in Is. 63:17. It is perhaps this situation more than any which we should fear – being hardened in sin, drawing ever closer to the waterfall of destruction, until we come to the point that the forces behind us are now too strong to

resist... Saul lying face down in the dirt of ancient Palestine the night before his death would be the classic visual image of it. And the Lord would be urging us to pray earnestly that we are not led in that downward spiral. His conversation in Gethsemane, both with the disciples and with His Father, had many points of contact with the text of the Lord's Prayer. "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" (Mt. 26:41) would perhaps be His equivalent of "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil".

For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever- AV and some manuscripts. "For Yours*..."* is significant. The sense of 'for' is definitely 'because…', but it could simply be with reference to the entire preceding prayer. Or it could particularly be with reference to the preceding request: "Deliver us from evil". In any case, the question arises: Why should God answer the prayer, be it the entire prayer or the specific request for deliverance from evil, because the Kingdom, power and glory is God's? The idea may be that because the Kingdom we seek now to be part of, and to eternally live in, is God's, therefore it follows that He earnestly desires to grant it to us His children. And we plead that He hears our requests, especially for deliverance from temptation and evil, because surely He wants to give us His glorious Kingdom. Because the Kingdom is *His*, all glory is to Him, and He wants to see us giving Him glory; because He has all power- therefore we ask Him to give us the requests we have made, because they are all intended to achieve glory to Him and to ensure our entry into His Kingdom. Another angle of exposition would be to consider that we ask for deliverance from temptation and sin because we know that God has rulership ("Kingdom") and power over all- given His unlimited physical and spiritual power, we ask Him to use it to answer our requests. This reasoning of course assumes that all that has preceded in the prayer is in order for us to enter the Kingdom and to see His glory worked out. Any requests for merely human benefit and advantage cannot be concluded with such an argument- that we ask God to hear this *because* the Kingdom, power and glory is His.

This is the appropriate conclusion to a prayer that asks for the establishment of that Kingdom. Whilst commenting upon the Lord's prayer, it is worth pointing out that the Lord repeated the essence of each phrase at various points during His life. When facing His ultimate struggle when facing up to the cross, He asked that the Father's Name would be glorified (Jn. 12:28)- quoting His own words from His model prayer. It hurt and cost Him so much to pray that prayer- the prayer we may have known for so many years that we can pray it almost at no cost. But to truly ask for the Father's will to be done is in fact a commitment to the way of the cross (Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:7-10; Mk. 14:36). So let us pray the prayer- but putting meaning into the words.

May I place two well-known Scriptures together in your minds. "*Yours* [God's] is the Kingdom". And "Blessed are you poor, for *yours* is the Kingdom *of God*" (Lk. 6:20). The Lord assures us that the Father wants to give *His* Kingdom to those who are poor in spirit, to the broken, to the self-doubters, the uncertain, those uncomfortable with themselves, the unbearably and desperately lonely, the awkwardly spoken… the poor in spirit. Those who would be the very last to believe that God would give *them* what is evidently *His* Kingdom. But not only *will* the Father do this, but Jesus stresses that it *is* ours right now. The certainty of the glory that will be revealed for us means that we cope better with suffering; as Paul writes, they "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Amen- AV and some manuscripts. Joachim Jeremias mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance" (See the article "Amen" in Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1971) pp. 35,36). Thus the Lord Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. But He did so because He wanted us to realize that if our spirit is united with God's, then our words to God are in a sense God talking to Himself; hence we say 'Amen' to our own words, when 'amen' was usually a confirmation of God's words. Jn. 16:26 fits in here, where in the context of speaking of the unity of the believers with the Father and with Himself, the Lord says that He will not need to pray for the believer, but God Himself will hear the believer. I take this to mean that Jesus foresaw that the time would come when our prayer would be His prayer. It's not so much that He prays for us, but rather prays with us and even through us.

6:14 *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*- The Lord guessed that His teaching to ask for forgiveness "as" we forgive others would be radical and hard to accept. The Lord's teaching in the prayer ["as we forgive"] was clear enough, but He repeats it twice (also in :15), so that there be no possible difficulty in interpretation. He rarely spells things out this specifically and with such immediate repetition. The vital, eternally vital need to forgive others is underlined. And the Lord repeats this teaching later in His teaching, with the further detail that unless we forgive others "from your hearts", we will not be forgiven (Mt. 18:35; also in Mk. 11:25). This chronic and urgent need to forgive others, aware that *how* we forgive them is the basis of *how* God will forgive us, leads to the question of whether we should forgive others without their repentance. If we first demand specific repentance, then this is the basis upon which we are asking to be judged;

and we all, surely, sin without repentance, sometimes because at the time we do not perceive the sinfulness of our behaviour.

6:15 *But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*- Paul alludes here in Eph. 4:32. Jesus said: "If you forgive, you'll be forgiven". Paul subtly changes the tenses: "You've been forgiven already, so forgive". It's as if Paul is saying: 'Think carefully about Mt. 6:14. Don't think it means 'If you do this, I'll do that for you'. No. God has forgiven you. But that forgiveness is conditional on the fact that in the future you will forgive people. If you don't, then that forgiveness you've already been given is cancelled. This is what Jesus really had in mind'. This would suggest a very close analysis of those simple words of Jesus, using all the logic and knowledge of Biblical principles which Paul had. Note that the command to forgive our debtors when we pray is applied by Paul to the need to forgive those who sin against us in the ecclesia (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

6:16 *Moreover when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces*- There is a semantic connection between these words. A *hupokrites* was a play actor, one who wore a mask. These hypocrites create false faces for themselves, that is the idea- their disfigured faces are but as a mask. The Greek for "disfigure" occurs only five times in the NT, once here- and twice in the next few verses, 6:19,20, where the Lord warns that external material wealth 'corrupts', destroys itself, or is disfigured. By disfiguring their faces, they were destroying their faces, destroying themselves because they wanted to appear other than they were.

So that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward- "May be seen" is s.w. 6:5, also in Mt. 23:27,28. To act in a way so as to spiritually impress men is especially distasteful to the Lord. The issue of what other churches, ecclesias or individuals will think of us is not to pay any part in our decision making and action. We are living, thinking and deciding in the loving gaze of the Father and Son. The wonder of that should mean that all fear of human criticism or desire for human approval plays absolutely no role.

6:17 *But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face*- Every effort is to be made to conceal our spiritual sacrifices. We are to appear as usual (as in Dan. 10:3). We are to be actors, hypocrites, in a good sense. The Lord is also alluding to how the rabbis forbad "washing and anointing" on the day of atonement, which was a day of fasting. The Lord is teaching open defiance to their hypocrisy.

6:18 *So you will not be seen by men to fast, but by your Father who is unseen; and your Father, who sees in secret*- Gk. 'the One who is in secret / hidden'. The hiddenness of God is in the sense that He specifically

looks at the hidden man of the heart (1 Pet. 3:4). This is the sphere in which He operates and sees.

Shall reward you- "Openly". Who we will eternally be in the Kingdom, is who we were secretly in this life. What we think about as we fall asleep, as we travel, walk down streets… this is the essence of the life in Christ. The change of nature we will experience at the Lord's return will simply be a physical manifestation of who we are in spirit in this life. We will be made manifest [s.w.], declared openly, at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13). This means that we will be preserved as we spiritually are in this life. This means that the development of our spiritual person is of paramount importance, because that is how we shall eternally be. The Lord goes right on to warn against materialism (:19,20). But that is in the context of the paramount need for the development of spiritual mindedness. It is petty materialism which is the greatest enemy of this development- the cares of this life and the attainment of material wealth are what crowd out spiritual thinking. The treasure, the most important thing in our life, is our "heart", our thinking (6:21; "the good treasure of the heart", 12:35). Building up spirituality is placed in opposition to building up material wealth.

6:19 *Do not store up for yourselves treasures upon the earth*- see on 6:18 "openly".

Where moth and rust consume- Or, "corrupt". James 5:2 alludes here and states that wealth is already rusted and moth-eaten. So this perhaps was the Lord's idea here, although the grammar is unclear. The idea of gold is that it doesn't rust. What appears to be permanent material wealth is not, and is already rusted in God's eyes.

And where thieves break in and steal- Literally, 'dig through'. Relevant to the earth houses of the very poorest people. The Lord's return is going to break up the house of those not looking for His return (Mt. 24:43 s.w.). It may be that 'thieves' is an intensive plural referring to the great thief, whom Jesus likens to Himself in Mt. 24:43. In this case He would be saying that He will take human wealth anyway at the last day- so we should give it to Him now and not seek it.
Because we know people (and brethren) who are richer and more wealth-seeking than we are, it's fatally easy to conclude that therefore we aren't rich, therefore we aren't materialistic. This is part of the subtle snare of materialism; that we all think that this is an area where we're not doing too badly; that really, we don't care *that* much where we live, or what the furniture's like, or whether we have money to take a holiday... But remember, our attitude to materialism is the litmus test of all our spirituality. None of us should be so quick to say that we're OK in this area. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break (Gk. dig) through and steal" (Mt. 6:19) was spoken to a huge crowd of Jewish peasants. The Lord

wasn't only referring to the few rich men who might be hanging around on the edge of the group. He was talking to all of them. He knew their mud walled homes which thieves could so easily dig through. That little cheap bangle, that ring, thinly buried under the bed mat after the pattern of Achan, that prized tunic... the petty riches of the poor which they so strove for, which *to them* were priceless treasures. This is what the Lord was getting at; and His point was that *every one of us*, from beggar to prince, has this 'laying up' mentality. He is almost ruthless in His demands.

6:20 *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes, and where thieves cannot break in or steal*- The idea is of incremental growth. It's as if spirituality, both in personality and deed, is carefully noted in Heaven as it occurs.

6:21 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*- Gk. 'to there'. The direction of our heart is towards where our treasure is. If our treasure is in Heaven, with God, then our life direction will be towards Him and not towards earthly things. The emphasis of the Lord throughout the Sermon has been on the state of the heart. The overall direction of our heart, our thinking, is all important. That direction cannot be both to earthly things and Heavenly things. Laying up treasure on earth cannot be done whilst having treasure in Heaven. The emphasis of course is on 'laying up', wilfully incrementing, not the mere possession of wealth which the Lord may send into our hands. 'Laying up' means to increment, not to merely possess. But it is the overall direction of our hearts which will be the deciding factor in our eternal destiny; 'to where' they are directed. And we can direct them by deciding what our treasure really is, and where it is.

6:22 *The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is healthy, your whole body shall be full of light*- This observation about single-mindedness ["healthy" = 'single'] follows on from the Lord's teaching about the overall direction of the human mind, observing that we cannot have two overall directions for our heart. Our eye must be single, the entrance of light must be only from one source. God gives to all men with a single eye (James 1:5 Gk.); and in response, we too must be single eyed in our giving (Mt. 6:22 s.w.- this is one of James' many allusions to the sermon on the mount). If our eye / world-view / outlook on life is *single* [s.w. 'simple' in the passages quoted], then our whole body / life will be full of light (Mt. 6:22). In daily work, in private reflection and planning for our immediate futures and present needs, there must be a direct and undiluted belief of the teachings of the Gospel, connecting those teachings to our daily life of faith. In this simplicity of the life of faith, in a world that makes life so complicated [especially for the poor], we will find humility. With that simplicity and humility will come peace,

and the ability to pray with a concentrated and uncluttered mind, without our thoughts wandering off into the petty troubles of life as we frame our words before Almighty God each morning and night.

I've always sensed that the more complex a person, the harder it is for them to be generous. But we are all commanded to be generous to the Lord's cause, knowing that nothing we have is our own. And I am not only talking to wealthy brethren. *All* of us have something, and all of us can give something to our brethren. Consider how the poor believers of the first century such as Corinth [amongst whom there were not many rich or mighty, Paul reminds them] collected funds for the poor brethren in Judea. There is a Greek word translated "simplicity" which is related to the word translated "single" here in Mt. 6:22. It occurs eight times in the NT. Five of these are in 2 Corinthians, written as it was in the context of Corinth giving funds for the Jerusalem poor.

Consider how the word is translated:
- Paul had "*simplicity* and Godly sincerity" (2 Cor. 1:12)
- They had "*liberality*" (2 Cor. 8:2)
- "*Bountifulness*" (2 Cor. 9:11)
- Their "*liberal distribution*" (2 Cor. 9:13)
- He feared lest they be corrupted from "the *simplicity* that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Evidently Paul saw a link between generosity and the simplicity of the faith in Christ. It doesn't need a lexicon to tell you that this word means both 'simplicity' and also 'generous'. The connection is because the basis for generosity is a simple faith. Not a dumb, blind faith, glossing over the details of God's word. But a realistic, simple, direct conviction. This is why Paul exhorts that all giving to the Lord's cause should be done with "simplicity" (Rom. 12:8- the AVmg. translates 'liberally'). Give, in whatever way, and don't complicate it with all the ifs and buts which our fleshly mind proposes. Paul warns them against false teachers who would corrupt them from their "simplicity"- and yet he usually speaks of 'simplicity' in the sense of generosity. Pure doctrine, wholeheartedly accepted, will lead us to be generous. False doctrine and human philosophy leads to all manner of self-complication. Paul was clever, he was smart; but he rejoiced that he lived his life "in simplicity...by the grace of God" (2 Cor. 1:12). If our eye is single (translating a Greek word related to that translated 'simple'), then the whole body is full of light (Mt. 6:22)- and the Lord spoke again in the context of generosity. An evil eye, a world view that is not 'simple' or single, is used as a figure for mean spiritedness.

6:23 *But if your eye is bad, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If*

therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!- A bad or evil eye was an idiom for mean spiritedness. It continues the theme of materialism from the previous verses. To follow materialism is to be mean spirited- towards God. Speaking in the context of serving *either* God *or* mammon, the Lord uttered these difficult words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... the light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness... how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:19-22). All this is in the context of not being materialistic. The Lord is drawing on the OT usage of "an evil eye" - and consistently, this idiom means someone who is selfishly materialistic (Prov. 22:9; 23:7; 28:22; Dt. 15:9). The NIV renders some of these idioms as "stingy" or "mean". A single eye refers to a generous spirit (1 Chron. 29:17 LXX), and a related Greek word occurs in 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13 with the sense of "generous". So surely the Lord is saying that our attitude to wealth controls our whole spirituality. Whether we have a mean or generous spirit will affect our whole life- an evil [stingy] eye means our whole body is full of darkness. Just let this sink in. If we are materialistic, our whole life will be filled with darkness, whatever our external pretensions may be, and there is a definite link to be made here with the "darkness" of rejection. The riches of Jericho are described with a Hebrew word which means both a curse, and something devoted (to God; Josh. 6:18). This teaches a powerful lesson: such riches of this world as come into our possession will curse us, unless they are devoted to the Father.

6:24 *No one can serve two masters-* It would be too simplistic to interpret this as meaning that we are either totally serving the Lord, or not serving Him. Paul seems to have thought a lot about this verse because he refers to it several times in Romans, basing his entire Romans chapter 6 around the idea that we do not serve sin as a Master (Rom. 6:6). But he goes straight on to lament that in reality, he does serve "the law of sin" with his flesh, but "I myself" serve the law of God (Rom. 7:25). And he concludes the letter by warning that some do not serve the Lord Jesus (Rom. 16:18). Perhaps Paul is writing partly in response to confusion about the Lord's words- for we keep on sinning, yet He taught we can only serve Him alone. And his perspective is that we ourselves as believers are totally devoted to Him as our only Lord and Master. But the flesh, which we do not identify as the real self of the believer, continues to serve the sin principle.

For either he will hate the one- The Lord wasn't just trying to shock us when He offered us the choice between hating God and loving Him (Mt. 6:24 cp. James 4:4); He was deadly literal in what He said. The Lord hammered away at the same theme when He spoke of how a tree can only bring forth one kind of spiritual fruit: bad, or good (Mt. 7:18,19).

James likewise: a spring can either give sweet water or bitter water (James 3:11). We either love God, or the world. If we love the world, we have *no* love of God in us (1 Jn. 2:15). The man who found the treasure in the field, or the pearl of great price, sold *all* that he had, in order to obtain it. If he had sold any less, he wouldn't have raised the required price. These mini-parables are Christ's comment on the Law's requirement that God's people love Him with *all* their heart and soul, realizing the logic of devotion. Samuel pleaded with Israel: " Serve the Lord with all your heart; and turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things [i.e. idols]" (1 Sam. 12:20,21). If we don't serve God whole-heartedly, we will serve the idols of this present age. There's no third road. If we are God's people, we will flee from the false teacher (Jn. 10:5). If we do anything other than this, we reflect our basic attitude to God's truth.

And love the other- Because Israel were in covenant with God, *therefore* they were not to make covenants with the other nations, and marriage is mentioned as an example of this (Ex. 34:10,12). In his repetition of this part of the law in Deuteronomy, Moses gave even more repeated emphasis to the fact that our covenant with God precludes any covenant relationship with anyone else: "Thou shalt make no covenant with them... neither shalt thou make marriages with them... for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all (other) people that are on the face of the earth. The Lord ...set his love upon you ...chose you... because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers... the Lord hath brought you out (of the world) with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen... know therefore that the Lord thy God, he God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments... and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them; he will not be slack to him that hateth him. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments..." (Dt. 7:2-11). The wonder of our relationship with Yahweh is stated time and again. To marry back into Egypt, the house of bondmen from which we have been redeemed, is to despise the covenant, to reverse the redemptive work which God has wrought with us. In this context of marriage out of the Faith, we read that God will destroy "him that hateth Him", and repay him to his face. On the other hand, not marrying Gentiles was part of *loving* God (Josh. 23:12,13). So according to Moses, whoever married a Gentile was effectively hating God. It is possible that the Lord had this in mind when He taught that we either serve God and hate the world, or we love the world and hate God (Mt. 6:24). This isn't, of course, how we see it. We would like to think that there is a third way; a way in which we can love God and yet also love someone in the world. Yet effectively, in God's eyes, this is hating Him. Doubtless many Israelites thought Moses was going too heavy in saying that those who married Gentiles were hating

God. And the new Israel may be tempted to likewise respond to the new covenant's insistence that our love of God means a thorough rejection of this world. Whoever even *wishes* to be a friend of the world is an enemy of God (James 4:4).

Or else he will be loyal to the one- There are only two masters whom we completely serve; we hold to either mammon, or God (Mt. 6:24). The idea of loyalty or "holding to" in Greek implies holding *against* something else; the result of holding to God is that we are against everything else. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mt. 12:30)- rather than being passively indifferent. Men reacted to the Lord in ultimately one of two ways- they either truly believed on Him, or supported the Jews in murdering Him (Jn. 11:45,46). Those who apparently believed on Him but kept it quiet were forced by the cross and resurrection to make their commitment one way or the other [and serious reflection on the memorials of these things in bread and wine leads us to the same decision]. So much for the philosophy of balance! The Hebrew word for vacillate (translated "dissemble" in AV) also means to go astray; indecision and indifference are effectively decisions against God's way. The Hebrew language often reflects God's characteristics and attitudes.

And despise the other- The Greek word is usually used elsewhere about despising other believers (Mt. 18:10; 1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Tim. 4:12; 6:2; 2 Pet. 2:10). Loving God involves loving our brother, and despising our brethren means we do not love God but rather despise Him.

You cannot serve God and money- When the Lord spoke of the impossibility of serving two masters, He personified the one as "Mammon" (AV), the antithesis of God. He goes on to define what he meant: "Therefore... take no *thought* for your life... which of you by *taking thought*... why *take ye thought* for raiment... therefore take no *thought* saying, What shall we eat?... seek ye first the Kingdom of God... take therefore no *thought* for the morrow" (Mt. 6:24,25,27,28,31,33,34). Clearly the Lord saw "Mammon", this personified anti-God, as an attitude of *mind*. He had the same view of 'Satan' as we do: a personification of sin in the human mind. He also saw seeking "the Kingdom of God" as somehow parallel with serving God rather than mammon. We would wish there were some third category, God, mammon and something in between; as we may idly speculate that it would suit us if there were three categories at judgement day, accepted, rejected, and something else. But both then and now, this very minute, this isn't the case. A deep down recognition of this will have its effect practically. If we are serving God, let's not give anything to mammon, let's not play games, juggling and using brinkmanship.

There is fair evidence that in God's eyes, our attitude to materialism is

the epitome of our spirituality. The Lord places before us only two possible roads: the service of God, or that of mammon (Aramaic for riches / wealth, Mt. 6:24). We would rather expect Him to have said: service of God or the flesh. Indeed, this is the choice that is elsewhere placed before us in the NT. However, the Lord evidently saw "mammon" as the epitome of all the flesh stands for. It is probably the view of many of us that while we have many areas of spiritual weakness, materialism is not one of them. But according to the Lord, if we are reading Him rightly, our attitude to the flesh generally is reflected in our attitude to wealth. This is why the Bible does have a lot to say about the sacrifice of 'our' material possessions; not because God needs them in themselves, but because our resignation of them to His service is an epitome of our whole spirituality.
Mt. 6:24 is alluded to in Tit. 1:9. Holding to God as your master rather than mammon is achieved through holding on to His word. Paul sees one application of serving mammon as acting in a hypocritical way in order to please some in the ecclesia (Mt. 6:24 = Gal. 1:10).

6:25 *Therefore I say to you*- Because our hearts can only be in one place, either with God or not, we should especially beware of materialism. For this more than anything else can lead us to hate God and to despise Him- because it takes our hearts away from Him.

Do not be anxious for your life; what you shall eat, or what you shall drink. Nor for your body; what you shall wear- The Sermon is concerned with how we think, with inculcating spiritual mindedness. The exhortations in this section against materialism arise out of that- they are appeals not to be materialistic and faithless in God's provision, because this leads to our thinking, our heart and mind, being on those things rather than with the Lord. It's true that the Greek translated 'thought' can mean 'no *anxious* thought'. But the problem is that we can make this mean that we are in fact allowed to spend a lot of time thinking about material things, so long as we're not 'anxious'. This line of interpretation seems to ignore the wider context. We can be spiritually minded, the Lord is teaching, if we simply accept that we shall never go hungry or naked. God will provide for His children who trust in Him. The Lord clearly saw material concerns as being the great enemy of daily spiritual mindedness. The emphasis upon not taking thought is considerable- the Lord uses the word five times in swift succession (Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34). And He repeats the command not to take thought for what we shall eat or drink (Mt. 6:25,31). Luke's record records this warning not to worry about what we shall 'eat and drink' only once (Lk. 12:29), but it is prefaced by the parable of the rich fool, upon whose lips we find the same words. After he has spent a lifetime amassing wealth, he says to himself "eat, drink and be merry" (Lk. 12:19). Clearly we are to understand him as a man who failed to live by the Lord's principles not to worry about eating and drinking. Yet he was not poor. He was fabulously rich. The point is thus

established that the rich, or at least those who have enough to eat and drink, are not to consider the Lord's principle as speaking only to the desperately poor who are tempted to worry about what they shall eat. The principle applies to the rich too. For it is a basic human principle that all of us, rich or poor, are tempted to expend mental thought about how we shall basically survive. The omission of the Sermon in John is typical of how John omits much of the Synoptic material, and yet repeats it in essence. He records the same 'eat and drink' language about our need eat and drink of the flesh and blood of the crucified Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:53). The point perhaps is that instead of expending mental energy worrying about how we shall eat and drink, we are to instead focus upon absorbing the Lord Jesus into our lives. And all material things will somehow fall into place. A similar idea is to be found in the Lord's warning not to worry about what clothing to "put on", because He uses the same word about how the rejected man had not 'put on' the wedding garment of the Lord's righteousness (Mt. 22:11). Repeatedly the later New Testament appeals for us to "put on [s.w.] the Lord Jesus" (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11,14; Col. 3:10,12; 1 Thess. 5:8), so that in the last day we may 'put on' the clothing of immortality (s.w. 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 2 Cor. 5:3). If putting on *this* garment is our mental focus, then we need not worry about what we shall 'put on' for clothing in this life.
This is alluded to in Phil. 4:6. How do we obey that command to "take no thought for your life"? By praying consciously for every little thing that you need in daily life, e.g. daily bread. We do not have two masters; only one. Therefore, the more we grasp this, the more we will give ourselves solely to Him. And this leads on, in the thinking of Jesus, to having no anxious thought for tomorrow; for a life of total devotion to Him means that we need not worry about tomorrow (Mt. 6:24,25). If we seek first His Kingdom, then we will not be anxious for tomorrow (Mt. 6:33,34).

Is not the life more than the food, and the body more than the garment?- This continues the theme outlined above. The presence of the articles focuses attention upon *the* life and *the* body- and surely the Lord has in view the life to come, which will involve having a glorious *body* (Phil. 3:21), not existence in any disembodied sense. The contrast is therefore between this present life, and *the* life to come; this present body, and *the* body which is to be given us. It's a question of identification; whether we focus upon this present life and body, or perceive that this life is but a miniscule percentage of our eternal existence, when we will not be living this life with this body. The life and the body to come are "more" than the present life and body; and the Greek for "more" is elsewhere translated 'the greater part', the idea being 'the major portion'. The vastly greater part of our existence will be with *the* life and *the* body which is yet to come. If we are secure in Christ and confident of our eternal destiny by His grace, then issues pertaining to this life and this body become insignificant.

6:26 *Look at*- Gk. 'gaze into'. Surely He drew attention to some birds flying around. And the Greek words behind "Behold" mean more than a casual glance. He asks us to look for some time with deep penetration at the birds of the natural creation, and learn a lesson.

The birds in the sky; they do not sow, nor do they reap or gather crops into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they?- As always, the Lord applied His words to Himself. For we sense in Mt. 8:20 that He had really thought about His words. Yes, the Father feeds the birds- but they have nests, and the Son of Man at least that night had nowhere to lay His head. Note too that the birds of the air are generally unclean (Acts 10:12). The fact God feeds even the unclean animals ties in with the Lord's opening comfort when He began the Sermon that His message is for those who worry about their uncleanness and spiritual inadequacy before God.

Sow... reap... gather into barns are words repeatedly used by the Lord Jesus, especially in Matthew, for the work of the Gospel. The seed of the word is *sown* (Matthew records three sowing parables- Mt. 13:3,24,31 cp. Mt. 25:26), then *reaped* at Christ's return (Mt. 25:26- as in 2 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 6:7-9; Rev. 14:15), and finally *gathered* (by the preachers and Angels, Mt. 3:12; 12:30; 13:30,47; 22:10; 25:26,32), "into my barn" (Mt. 3:12; 13:30)- the Kingdom. We cannot simply ignore all this use of identical language in Matthew's Gospel. I noted at 6:25 and elsewhere that the Sermon is often saying 'Do not worry about the activities which are part of this life, but focus instead on doing those activities in a spiritual sense'. I gave the example of how the command not to worry about what we shall physically eat and drink implies that we should instead be concerned about our spiritual eating and drinking. Remembering the focus of the Sermon upon the need for outgoing, proactive sharing of the Gospel, it would be fair to conclude that the Lord wishes us to not worry about sowing, reaping and gathering into barns in the literal sense, but instead to concern ourselves with doing those things *in the work of the Gospel*. 'Focus on sharing the Gospel, and all the material things will fall into place if you just trust that they will work out OK'.

God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. "If God so clothe the grass of the field... shall He not much more clothe you?" (Mt. 6:30). In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow so much as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. The idea of every little thing in life and the world being controlled by Angels contradicts the notion that God has set this world in motion according to certain natural laws, and that things

continue without His direct intervention- as if the whole system is run by clockwork which God initially wound up. Intervention in this system by God has been called 'the hand of providence'. However, these ideas surely contradict the clear Biblical teaching that every movement in the natural creation is consciously controlled by God through His Angels, thus needing an energetic input from Him through His Spirit for every action to occur. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feeds them" suggests that God consciously feeds the birds with their every mouthful. See too Mt. 5:45; 6:30; 10:29-31; Job 38:12,32; 39:27; Amos 9:6; Is. 40:7; Ps. 90:3; 104: 13; Prov. 11:1.

Things being "better than" or "of more value than" is quite a theme in the thinking of the Lord Jesus. The Greek word is used by Him at least three times in this way. Better than the birds, than many sparrows (Mt. 10:31), than a sheep (Mt. 12:12). Doubtless this thought was developed in the Lord by His observation of birds, flocks of sparrows and sheep- developing the implications of the simple thought that we are of more value than them to God. For we are made in His image in a way in which they are not.

6:27 *Which of you by worrying*- As always, the emphasis is upon the state of the heart. No amount of mental worry can add anything to us. And so our hearts and minds should instead be devoted to the God who can transform our body into an eternal state of existence (see on 6:25).

Can add- The same word occurs in 6:33. We cannot ultimately 'add' anything to ourselves in secular life; if we seek first the things of God's Kingdom [i.e. 'take thought' for them rather than our material life], then what is necessary for the material, human life will be added to us. The concept of 'addition' suggests we are to see ourselves as ourselves *without* the issues of food, clothing and survival. We are then to decide how we are to take care of those 'additional' issues. And the Lord is teaching that we are to focus upon spiritual things and the service of God's Kingdom, believing that He will 'add' these things to us. To perceive ourselves independent from our human, secular needs and position is hard. But Paul got the idea right when he spoke of how we bring nothing into this world and can take nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7). 'We' come into this world; we exist, but have nothing added to us initially. And 'we' exit this world, likewise without anything 'added'.

One cubit to his stature- The Greek can mean 'age' as well as referring to our body. No amount of secular thought can add age to our lives. Because life, the eternal life, comes only from God. So it is to Him that our hearts belong. Again, the Lord Jesus was the word of the Sermon made flesh in His own example. For we read that He grew in stature before God (Lk. 2:52 s.w.)- not by anxious worldly thought. Perhaps Zacchaeus thought upon the implications of the Lord's words, because Luke uses the same

word to note that he was of inadequate stature (Lk. 19:3). The 'stature' that we seek to attain is not any physique or longevity in this life- but the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13 s.w.). The amount of thought and effort that goes into trying to live longer, adding a cubit to our lifespan, is immense. And understandably so, for those who have only this life. Surely the Lord is saying that we should give no anxious thought to this, but rather, give our mental energy to growing into the age / stature of Himself.

6:28 So *why do you worry about clothing?*- The allusion is surely to how God provided food, drink and clothing which didn't wear out for the Israelites on their wilderness journey (Dt. 8:4), just as He will for those who have crossed the Red Sea in baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2). Again, it seems likely that the Lord intended us to refocus from material to spiritual. For later in Matthew we read of Him emphasizing the ultimate importance of having the right 'clothing' [s.w. "wedding garment"] to enter God's Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 22:11,12). On a simply practical level, it's my observation that many believers find spirituality hard because their minds are too taken up with making money- to fund the buying of branded, designer clothing. In our generation as never before, the price range of clothing is as never before. It is rather beyond me why in a brotherhood of need, it seems perfectly acceptable to not buy good second hand clothing and pay ten or more times the price for new clothing with the right brand name on it. But maybe that's just me.

Consider the lilies of the field- Gk. 'to study deeply', used only here in the NT. The same idea, although a different word, as the Greek for "Behold" in 6:26. Whilst no doubt the Lord with a wave of the hand did draw attention to the mountain lilies growing where He was teaching, He was most definitely not inviting us to take a cursory glance at them. But rather to study them; and the unusual Greek word used for "consider" drove home that point. Perhaps He picked one and invited the disciples to gaze at it in silence for some time.

How they grow- The Greek can mean 'in what way' and also 'how much', 'to what great extent'.

They neither toil nor spin!- As so often in the Lord's teaching and parables, He was careful to balance what He said with relevance to both men ['toiling' in Greek has the idea of heavy labour], and women [spinning]. The later appeal for those who are 'toiling' in heavy labour to come to Christ (Mt. 11:28) is an invitation to know in this life a lifting of the curse of labour which came upon Adam. This is not to say that we shall not have to labour, but the desperate toiling for survival is mitigated by the knowledge that God will ultimately provide for His people.

6:29 Yet *I say to you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these*- It is hard to avoid the connection with the description of

the righteous as being clothed in glory at the last day. The clothing metaphor is repeated throughout the NT in this connection (e.g. Rev. 3:5,18; 7:9,13; 19:8). Of course we are dealing with metaphor here- plants are not literally clothed, although perhaps the Lord was alluding to them flowering as their 'glory'. The lily is glorious for what it is, not because it has laboured to make itself something other than it is. We will be made glorious by God in Christ. The city set on a hill cannot be hid. We are who and as we are before God. There is nothing to cover with clothing. This consideration alone puts the whole issue of present clothing into perspective.

The Lord Jesus hinted indirectly at Solomon's pride when he said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one wild flower, symbolic of how God would clothe, with imputed righteousness, even the weakest believer (Mt. 6:29,30). This reference to Solomon is only one of several hints that our Lord read Solomon in a negative light. He goes on to warn against excessive attention to food, drink and clothes (Mt. 6:31)- all things which the court of Solomon revelled in to a quite extraordinary extent. "Take therefore no (anxious) thought for the morrow... sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt. 6:34) sounds like a rebuke of the way Solomon did just this in Ecclesiastes, as he intellectually battled with the sadness of knowing that all his achievements would mean nothing in the future. "But", says Jesus, "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt. 6:33)- clearly a reference to Solomon seeking Divine wisdom and subsequently being blessed; surely the Lord is telling us to follow Solomon's example in this, but to avoid his pride and materialism. Solomon didn't seek the future Kingdom of God, but rather his own. The Lord taught that we should love our enemies, and not fall into the trap of only loving those who love us (Mt. 5:44-46). He seems to be alluding here to Solomon's claim that wisdom says: "I love them that love me" (Prov. 8:17). Maybe I'm wrong, and the Lord didn't have His mind there on that passage; but in the context of Him re-interpreting and re-presenting Solomon to us, it seems likely that He was consciously showing that God's grace is in fact the very opposite of what Solomon thought. God loves His enemies, and doesn't only love those who love Him; and this is to be our credo likewise. The record of how Solomon spoke of his building of the temple can now be seen as blatant pride in his external appearance of spirituality; without the foregoing analysis of the *hints* of Solomon's pride, this wouldn't necessarily be a correct conclusion to reach; but with all these inspired links, surely we can read the following as pure pride: "Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven (hardly praying in his closet! Was Christ alluding to Solomon in Mt. 6:6?)... the house that I have built for thy name" (1 Kings 8:22,44). Solomon's frequent emphasis on the fact that *he* built the house makes a telling

connection with the principle that God does not live in houses *built* by men (Acts 17:24?)

6:30 *Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is here today*- The blessings God gives us do not come by clockwork- we thankfully recognize they are individual acts of mercy towards us. Perhaps our sometimes 'clockwork' prayers are an indication that we think God's blessings of food etc. are clockwork too? In the same way, God individually and consciously cares for each blade of grass. Fundamentally, they do not grow merely as a result of chemical combination or photosynthesis, but due to the conscious care of God using such processes. See on 6:26. The worry-free life is a characteristic of the true believer. If God gave us His Son, how much more will He not give us "all things"? The Lord brought out the point in Mt. 6:30: If God so clothes the grass… how much more will He clothe us, therefore, don't worry! "Clothe" translates the Greek *amphi-hennumi*- to enrobe around. The Lord seems to have been referring to a type of wild flower that appears to be draped around by its natural skin, rather like an iris. God gives the wild flowers robes… although they do not spin them or work for them (Mt. 6:29). Solomon's robes weren't as beautiful as them. And how *much more* will God clothe us, both literally and with salvation (for this is how the Bible usually uses the idea of God clothing us). God does so much for the lilies, who are to be 'thrown into the fire'… a phrase which inevitably connects with the Lord's other uses of that idea to describe the final condemnation of the wicked (as in James 1:11). God cares for flowers, and He even cares and provides for those whom He will one day condemn. For God to keep such people alive is a conscious outflowing of His lavish energy, His gracious gift of life and health. If He does that for things and persons which will ultimately be 'thrown into the fire', how *much more* will He clothe us. Let's remember that creation isn't run on clockwork; God makes His rain come, and His sun to rise, on the just and unjust; He's aware when a bird falls from the air; counts the hairs on our heads, as a mother dotes over a new-born baby's features. Just by keeping alive humanity (indeed, all of creation), God is lavishing His grace and consciously outgiving of Himself.

But tomorrow is thrown into the furnace- We have noted that the idea of 'casting' is used by the Lord with reference to condemnation at the last day; and 'the oven' is reminiscent of the imagery of Gehenna fire to destroy the rejected. If God shows so much care and gives so much passing glory to that which shall be rejected and be ultimately unused by Him in eternity- how much more will he clothe us whom He loves and has accepted with His nature. All worry about what garment we shall physically put on, let alone whether it has a brand name on it or not, becomes subsumed beneath the wonder of the metaphor of our final clothing.

Will He not more surely care for you, O you of little faith!- The word is used another three times in Matthew (Mt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). In each case it refers specifically to a lack of faith in the saving power of Jesus. The "little faith" is not so much in God's promised provision of physical clothing, but in the promise of final clothing in salvation. But God's care even for those whom He shall condemn, keeping them in life, and the glory He gives to the plant and animal creation which last but for days, is sure encouragement that He shall so much more super abundantly clothe us with salvation- and also, will ensure we don't go physically naked in this world. The Gospel records, as transcripts of the disciples' early preaching, show the disciples appealing to others to have faith, to believe and be baptized. And yet the same accounts record so often how weak and small was the disciples' faith. Matthew is a classic example: Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20. It was on the basis of this acknowledged weakness of their own, that the disciples could appeal so powerfully to others. The more real they showed themselves to be, the more credible was their appeal.

6:31 *Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, How shall we be clothed?*- The three things God provided for Israel in their wilderness journey. The same old clothes, food (manna) and water, of course. But He provided for them.

God will provide for us to be "clothed", but the question is, how does He provide? The same word is used in Mt. 25:36,38,43 about the believer in Christ who is not clothed, and needs to be clothed by other believers- some of whom refuse to, whilst others do. If God really does provide food and clothing for His people- why are some apparently without them? One window onto that question might be that potentially all such needs have been met, in that the food and clothing is within the brotherhood. But there can be a dysfunction, in that it is not shared out as it should be- meaning that some go without the provision which God has potentially provided. But another window is that David could say that he had never seen the seed of the righteous begging bread at any time in his long and varied life (Ps. 37:25). And despite a lifetime in the poorer world I also have yet to encounter this. The promise holds true, in my observation.

6:32 *For the Gentiles clamour for all these things*- God's people who worry and spend their thoughts on eating, drinking and clothing are no better than the Gentile world. This was a radical thing to say to first century Jews. It is a common Biblical theme that the unspiritual amongst God's people shall share the judgments of the world whom in spirit they are like. The idea of the Gentiles seeking is of course from Is. 11:10, where we read that finally the Gentiles will seek unto Christ (as in Acts 15:17). Perhaps the idea is that we should right now have that changed direction of 'seeking' which the Gentile world will have in the future. Our practical life in Christ is really all about our response to the abounding

nature of God's grace. If we really believe it, then we will trust in Him and not worry. Mt. 6:32 goes on to imply that the difference between the Gentile world and the believer in Christ is quite simply that we believe that our Father has this level of care and concern for us; and therefore we will not worry, whereas the unbelieving world worry constantly about material things. This is how much of a 'first principle' this really is.

'Clamour' is the idea of seeking, and is parallel with 'thinking' anxiously in :31. Again it is the overall direction of our hearts, to where our seeking is set, our mental life and thinking, which is the issue. Rather than individual acts of spiritual failure or success.

Even though your heavenly Father knows you have need of them all- God knows our human situation. Our faithlessness and lack of spiritual mindedness is because of an unspoken sense that actually He is unaware of our needs and the nature of being human. But the God who knows all things is not unaware of humanity and the needs which accompany being human. Frequently the prophecies directed to the Jews returning from Babylon spoke at length of God's amazing knowledge- because the sense was that whilst God existed, He did not know close-up about the human situation. He does, of course, know perfectly.

Hapas, 'all things', means strictly 'each and every one of'. God knows every single human need relating to eating, drinking, clothing and existing. And He knows better than we do our greatest need- to eat and drink of that bread and blood which gives eternal life, and to be clothed with His nature.

6:33 *So seek first*- Seeking is paralleled with taking thought in :31,32. The overall direction of our lives must be towards the Kingdom of God above all. If that is put "first", then actually there is no room for thought about much else. The idea is not 'Seek the Kingdom first, and other things secondly'. Rather must the 'seeking' of our thinking be towards the Kingdom. 'Seeking' was a common Hebraism for 'worship'. But the Lord has defined 'seeking' as thinking, as the overall direction of our mental state, our heart. It was not merely a question of going through the worship rituals of Judaism in a holy space such as the temple. True worship is redefined as the state of our heart.

His Kingdom- I noted under 6:10 that the coming of the Kingdom in our lives is through the doing of God's will. The Lord's message is not simply that we should long for the coming of the Kingdom at His second coming; it is that starting right now, we should seek above all things to extend the principles of the Kingdom (as taught in the Lord's parables of the Kingdom) in our lives and in the world around us.

And His righteousness- The Sermon was intended for those who earnestly wished to be righteous but felt unable to attain it as they wished (see on

5:6). Yet we should continue 'seeking' it. And Paul takes the thought further by declaring that if we really seek to be righteous, then we will become "in Christ" and believe in God's offer of imputed righteousness.

And all these things- Semitic languages such as Aramaic and Hebrew can often have various levels of meaning in a phrase. The phrase may mean or say one thing, but also suggest something else. We are of course reading the expression of those phrases in Greek. *Pas tauta* (usually translated "all these things") need not necessarily be translated as a plural. The idea could equally be 'The whole, complete thing'- we might say 'The real deal'. And that would make sense of the connection between 'added' and Mt. 6:27, which speaks of how we cannot 'add' a cubit to our lifespan. The implication could be that 'the real deal', the *real* thing- eternal life, salvation in God's Kingdom- shall be added if we seek that Kingdom first and foremost. Alternatively, we can interpret more in line with the common translations and understand that 'all these things' is the same 'all these things' of the preceding verse 32- the material things which God knows we need. These things *will be added* to us if we do not seek them first, but rather seek God's Kingdom first. But there is the suggestion that the real 'all things' for us is eternity in God's Kingdom. For a discussion of what may have happened if these basic things are apparently *not* added to a believer, see on 6:31.

Shall be added to you- The only other usage of the word in Matthew is just a few verses earlier, where the Lord has pointed out that we are unable to 'add' a cubit to our length of human life nor to our body height (6:27).

6:34 *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*- The only other occurrence of the Greek word in Matthew is a few verses earlier in :30. God provides for the grass which "tomorrow" will be cast into the fire. We observed under 6:30 that this is the language of condemnation. If God even keeps alive and provides for those who shall be condemned, and the things of the animal and plant creation which live for only a day or so, how much more will He care for us. The "tomorrow" which is in view is therefore the ultimate 'tomorrow'- of the coming of Christ. We are to take no anxious thought for the outcome of that day if we know that in our hearts we are seeking the things of the Kingdom above all. In the same spirit, Paul taught that all who wholeheartedly love the Lord's appearing shall be saved (2 Tim. 4:8). We should not be full of worried thought about our possible rejection on that day, but rather the overall thinking of our mind should be positively full of the things of the Kingdom. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" could be read as meaning 'Yes there will be evil for some on that day, but don't waste your thoughts worrying about that. If your heart is for the Kingdom of God, you are secure. Don't worry about it". Although this is the ultimate sense of 'tomorrow' which

the Lord has in mind, His words can be understood on a quite simple literal level too. We are to live one day at a time without worrying about the future, because quite simply- God will provide. Each day has its own problems, and don't worry about them ahead of time. Rather focus your thinking and mental energy upon the things of God's Kingdom. This is exactly in the spirit of the command in the Lord's model prayer to ask for enough food only for today (6:11). Living like this is of course seen by the world as irresponsible. But it is not irresponsible if we do so with a firm faith that God is responsible for our tomorrows.

CHAPTER 7

7:1 *Judge not, that you be not judged*- For Paul, one phrase from these chapters echoed in his mind throughout the years; thus "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Mt. 7:1) is at the basis of Rom. 2:1; the whole of Rom. 14, and 1 Cor. 4:3,5. The Lord's teaching about judging does not in fact say that the act of condemning our brother is in itself a sin- it's simply that we must cast out the beam from our own eye first, and then we can judge our brother by pointing out to him the splinter in his eye. But the Lord tells us not to judge because He foresaw that we would never completely throw out the beam from our own eye. His command not to judge / condemn at all was therefore in this sense a concession to our inevitable weakness (Mt. 7:1-5). The commentary of James on this part of the Sermon is interesting: "Don't speak against one another, brothers. He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge" (James 4:11). In what sense is to judge / condemn our brother to judge the law? And which law? Maybe James considered Mt. 7:1 to be so fundamental a part of "the law of Christ" that he refers to it as "the law". I suggest under 7:24 that James considers the Sermon to be "the perfect law". The Lord had taught clearly that under His law, to condemn meant being condemned. Yet there were those in James' readership, as there are today, who think they can go ahead and condemn others. Seeing the Lord's law is so clear, James is saying that effectively they are condemning the law of Jesus, placing themselves as judges over His law by deciding that they can break it at will.

7:2 For *with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged*- The "judgment" is of condemnation- every one of the 28 occurrences of the Greek word refer to "damnation" or "condemnation". The 'judging' which is prohibited in :1 is therefore of condemning others.

And with what measure you use, it shall be applied to you- This verse begins with "For". Because of the principle that we shall be condemned if we condemn, we need to remember that we will receive according to the measure we use to people in this life. Again, a direct connection is made between our judgment experience before Jesus at the last day, and our attitude to others now.

7:3 *And why do you see the splinter that is in your brother's eye but ignore the plank that is in your own eye?*- In Luke, the Lord prefaces this mini-parable by saying that the blind can't lead the blind. For Him, a man with even slightly impaired vision was effectively blind. In this very context He speaks of the need to be "perfect... as his master". Only the perfect, by implication, can criticize their brethren. And the final reason He gives for not attempting to cast out the plank from our brother's eye is

that "For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit”. This is rather hard to understand in the context. But on reflection, it seems that He is teaching that if we are good trees, we will have no corrupt fruit, no splinters in our eye- and because none of us are like this, there is corrupt fruit on each of us, we aren't perfect as our Master, therefore we shouldn't think of trying to cast out the plank from our brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-43). And of course He bids us to be perfect as our Father is. These high standards of demand were mixed with an incredible grace. Only a man who was evidently perfect could speak like this with any realness or credibility. Otherwise His words would just have been seen as the ravings of a weirdo. But there was a realness to His perfection that made and makes His demands so piercingly appropriate to us. The way He handled His perfection is a wonderful insight into His character. He knew that He was without sin; and He knew that the life He lived moment by moment was to be the pattern for all God’s people. Yet somehow, He handled this in a manner which was never arrogant, never proud, and never off-putting to sinners; but rather, actually inviting to them.

This continues the context about judging from verses 1 and 2. Our attitude to others will be the Lord's attitude to us at the last day. If we are hyper-critical of others, then this is how the Lord will look upon us. If *He* should mark iniquity in us, none could stand (Ps. 130:3)- and we should struggle with the natural human tendency to mark iniquity in others. The question 'Why...?' is answered by the Lord in verse 4- He perceived that we excuse our judgmentalness and critical attitudes with the excuse that we actually want to assist the poor person who is the object of our critical gaze. How many times have we heard the bitterest, most carping criticism of others- rounded off with the excuse 'I actually really feel so sorry for him'. This is the very mentality the Lord is bringing to our attention. He bids us realize how we justify critical attitudes towards others on the basis that we kind ourselves that we want to help them.

The splinter is literally, a twig. Both a twig and a beam are all of the same material- wood. If the Lord was indeed a woodworker, He would have prepared this teaching during meditation in His workplace. The point is, all our faults are of the same essence. The problem is that although we have been called out of darkness / blindness into the light of life, we are still blind in so many ways- even though blindness is a feature of the unsaved, and ignorance of God is the basis of His anger with men (2 Thess. 1:8). Crystal clear teaching of Jesus relating to wealth, brotherly love, personal forgiveness, the vital unity of His church, personal purity… these all go ignored in some way by each of us, and therefore by us as a community. The Lord gently warns us that we are *all* likely to be blind in some way- why, He asks, are we so keen to comment on our brother's blindness / darkness, when we too have such limited vision (Mt. 7:3)? We can read the same passages time and again, and fail to let them really

register.

"Consider not" is alluded to by James. James is full of references to the Sermon, and James 1:23,24 repeat this Greek word for "consider". James warns that we can be like the man who considers / beholds his face in a mirror and then carries on with life, immediately forgetting what he has seen of himself. It's not that we are totally, blissfully unaware of our faults. We see / consider them, but for a fleeting moment. And then live as if we have not seen them. The Lord is telling us to indeed see / consider our own planks. The idea seems to be that the plank in our own eye is our judgmental attitude towards our brother. This is what damages our vision; John teaches that we cannot see where we are walking if we hate our brother in our heart (1 Jn. 2:11). If we are without this major impediment to our vision, then maybe we will be able to assist others with removing small parts [a twig] of the major problems [a beam] which we have ourselves overcome.

7:4 *Or how will you say to your brother*- Remember that the Sermon was spoken to the disciples. The Lord is foreseeing how things would tend to go in the life of His collective people. There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. Christ's parables often have an element of unreality in them to highlight how His attitudes are unusual (e.g. the employer who pays all his men the same wages for different hours of work). And these unusual attitudes of His reflect the sensitivity of Jesus. But in this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, it's presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story. Perhaps He intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can... See on 13:28.

Let me remove the splinter in your eye, when you have a plank in your own eye?- "Remove" is s.w. 'cast out' in :5. The word is elsewhere used

about the casting out of the rejected in condemnation (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). It is also used about casting out from church (3 Jn. 10) and synagogue and society (Acts 13:50; Jn. 9:34; Lk. 6:22). In Luke's account of the Lord's presentation of the material, he uses the same word for "cast out" from religious association (Lk. 6:22) as he does just a few verses later for this 'casting out' of splinters (Lk. 6:42). The casting out is therefore a judgmental condemning of others- and that is the connection with the preceding context of Mt. 7:1-3. In practice, this involved religious disfellowship. Christ's people are to associate with each other in fellowship because they are convinced that by grace, they in the body of Christ shall share eternity together. To 'cast out' from fellowship someone is therefore to effectively 'cast them out' in condemnation. The same word is used in both senses. The Lord's parable is most insightful- because He observes that actually to do this is a natural tendency for His followers, and they will justify it in terms of thinking they are doing it out of concern. And yet their attempt to do this is in fact the plank in their own eye. That judgmentalism is in fact a far worse failing than any fault they have observed in their brother. And this all flows directly and seamlessly on from the Lord's point blank statement that He will condemn those who condemn others (Mt. 7:1). The practice and upholding of the wicked practice of disfellowship therefore appears to be an issue upon which our eternity may be staked. We must pay any price, including social death and being cut off from communities and families we have known and loved, in order to avoid doing this.

We cannot "behold" our plank. This is an invitation to try to actually see the plank in your own eye. The plank is there exactly because you have tried to 'cast out' your brother, having heard the Lord's teaching about the need for a "single eye" (Mt. 6:22) and deciding that your brother's eye is defective. The plank is your judgmentalism. And that is what is so hard to perceive.

7:5 *You hypocrite*- Usually on the Lord's lips with reference to the Pharisees whom the Lord clearly detested and whom the rank and file disciples whom He was addressing likewise despised. But the Lord is saying that their critical, condemnatory attitude to each other would make them no different to the Pharisees.

First- The Greek *proton* suggests that the following clause is of ultimate, supreme importance; it's not simply a chronological statement that 'first do this, then do that'. If we condemn ourselves in our self-examination, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). We are to most importantly [Gk. *proton*] “cast out” the beam from our own eye (Lk. 6:42)- and the Lord uses the same word about the ‘casting forth’ of the rejected at the last day. We are to judge our own weaknesses as worthy of condemnation.

Remove the plank from your own eye and then shall you- We are to condemn ourselves firstly, recognizing our major blindness, and then with the humility of spirit elicited by this, we will have crystal clear vision with which to assist others.

See clearly to remove the splinter in your brother's eye- The Greek *dia-blepo* is related to the verb *blepo* in :3 ("why do you *behold / see* the splinter..."). The judgmental believer sees the splinter in his brother's eye and wants to condemn him for it, but the one who has repented of his judgmentalism and removed that plank from his spiritual vision will see through ('through' is really the sense of *dia*). The translation "see clearly" doesn't seem to me to have much to commend it. The one who has repented of the plank of his judgmentalism will see through casting out / condemning the splinter in his brother's eye. "Then" you will see through casting out the splinter from his eye- *tote* more comfortably carries the sense of 'right then'. The moment you repent of your condemnatory judgmentalism, you immediately see through condemning your brother's weakness. And so the Lord has powerfully enforced His principle which He began with at the start of this section- do not condemn. And through this profound parable of casting out splinters and planks, He has brought us to see through our brother's splinter. But the only way you can do that is to cast out / condemn your own condemnatory attitudes. It is often claimed that those who have committed what some would see as 'major' sins feel unable to judge others for their sins, and this is seen as a weakness. But actually, we are all major sinners. Those who have repented or matured into softer, non-condemnatory attitudes are mature, and not 'weak' as they are portrayed by their hard line brethren.

The Lord foresaw the problems we would have within our community of believers in Him; from the schisms of the first century to the struggles of latter day believers. This story is a classic- of the carpenter with a beam in his own eye who is so keen to extract the splinter from the eye of his fellow worker (note how he almost forces himself upon his brother to do this!). There is something grotesque, absurd, over the top in this story. In this story of the two carpenters there is something not only unreal, but almost cartoon-like. We read it and think 'The Lord's obviously exaggerating, nobody would really be so foolish'. But that's exactly how He knew we would think! Our attempts to sort out our brother really are that absurd! Christ is effectively saying: 'Now, I know you'll think I'm exaggerating- but I'm not' (Lk. 6:41,42). Often it seems the Lord intends us to think His parables through to their end, imagining the necessary details. A splinter will come out of the eye naturally, its presence will provoke tears which ultimately will wash it out. 'The grief of life will work on your brother to solve his problem, there are some spiritual weaknesses

which time and the experience of life will heal; but I know you people will want to rush in and speed up the spiritual growth of your brother. But you can't do it!'. Christ even foresaw how we will stress the fact that our fellow believer is our "brother" as we try to do this; as if we'll try to be so righteous in the very moment when in God's eyes we do something grotesquely foolish. Doubtless the Lord's carpenter years were the time when He formulated this story of the two carpenters. Significantly they both had wood in their eye- as if a brother will tend to seek to correct another brother who has in essence the same weaknesses, but the 'helping' brother considers that the other brother's is so much greater than his. Perhaps the Lord intends us to take it further, and pick up the implication that these two carpenters couldn't help each other; but there's another one who can...

In Luke, having spoken of the need to tolerate our brother, the Lord Jesus repeated His common theme: that there is no third road: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye...? For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Lk. 6:41-43). There's no third position. Either we love our brother, and bring forth good fruit; or we don't get down to it, and bring forth bad fruit. We can't sometimes bring forth good, sometimes bad. At heart, we are either loving or selfishly hateful. Anything less than following Yahweh with all our heart is seen as doing evil in His eyes (1 Kings 11:6).

If we can achieve true self-examination, perceiving what needs to be cast out of our lives and doing so, we have achieved something extremely valuable. We need to ask ourselves what real, practical influence the Gospel is having upon us; for life in Christ is about change, not mere acceptance (let alone inheritance) of a theological position which we loyally preserve to the end of our days as many misguided religious folk do. The value of true change is brought out powerfully when the Lord speaks of casting our pearls before pigs, to be trodden underfoot by them. He says this immediately after stating that we are to "cast out" the beams from our own eyes; but we are not to "cast [out]" our pearls before pigs (Mt. 7:5,6)- the Greek words for "cast out" in 7:5 (*ek-ballo*) and "cast" in 7:6 (*ballo*) are related. Clearly verse 6 belongs in the section about judging which begins in :1. The idea of being "cast out" is found earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, where the Lord warns of how saltless salt will be "cast out" and trodden underfoot (Mt. 5:13), the unforgiving will be "cast out" into prison (Mt. 5:25), those without fruit will be "cast out" into the fire (Mt. 7:29). To be cast out is to be rejected at the last day; and by condemning ourselves now in our self-examination, casting out the eye that offends (Mt. 5:29,30), we avoid having to be "cast out" at the last judgment. If we condemn ourselves now in our self-examination, we shall not need to be condemned at the last day (1 Cor.

11:31). But we are not to cast out our pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and attack us. In this context, I take this to mean that the offending eyes etc. which we cast out are not to be cast out to the world, lest they condemn us (which is how the Lord used the figure of trampling underfoot in Mt. 5:13). Thus the teaching about not casting pearls before pigs is seamlessly in context with the previous teaching about casting the beam out of our eye. Our repentances are to be before God and not necessarily the uncomprehending world. The pigs would've confused true pearls with swine feed, and become angry once they realized those stones weren't food but stones. They just wouldn't have appreciated them. This isn't any justification for hypocrisy; it's simply stating that repentance is a private thing before God. But the point to note is that the offending eyes etc. which are cast out are likened by the Lord to "pearls"; they are of such priceless value. Thus we see the colossal importance of true change, of self-examination resulting in the transformation of human life in practice.

7:6 *Do not give*- We are to judge, but not to condemn (7:1). Clearly this verse 6 requires us to show discernment.

That which is holy to the dogs- Hagios, "the holy", could be translated 'the holy ones', the saints. They were not to be thrown out to the dogs- i.e. to be condemned. This command not to condemn would then fit in seamlessly with the teaching of the preceding verses. The dogs which were on the edge of the city are associated with condemnation in both Jewish thought and Biblically (Ps. 59:6,14; Rev. 22:15). We are not to condemn, to throw the saints out to the dogs.

Nor cast- Ballo, related to *ekballo* ("cast out") in :5. I have noted several times that 'casting out' is used in the Lord's thought for condemnation.

Your pearls- Pearls represent the believers. The 12 pearls of Rev. 21:21 represent the 12 disciples. The Lord Jesus in His work with us is "seeking goodly pearls" (Mt. 13:45). The pearls are 'ours' in the sense that all that are Christ's are ours, as He makes explicit in John 17. His pearls are our brethren.

Before the pigs, lest they trample them under their feet- Trampling by pigs was another Jewish figure of condemnation, of rejection into the Gentile world. Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord used the figure of trampling [s.w.] to describe condemnation and rejection (Mt. 5:13). To trample under foot meant to despise and specifically, to reject (s.w. Heb. 10:29 "trodden underfoot the Son of God"). Again the point is being made- don't

condemn your brethren and treat them as mere worldlings, or even worse, those who shall be rejected from God's Kingdom. To refuse to fellowship them is treating them just like that.

And turn again and tear you to pieces- If we condemn our brethren, as it were casting them out to the pigs- those same pigs will turn on us and rend us- i.e., *we* will share the same condemnation which we gave our brethren. And thus the point of 7:1 is repeated- if you condemn, you shall be condemned. The same word translated "rend" is used by the Lord in Mt. 9:17 about how the wine of the new covenant will "burst" or destroy the old wineskins and the wine will run out from them. The bursting or rending of the wineskins is a picture of destruction and condemnation. The pigs of condemnation to whom we consigned our brethren will turn again and trample *us* underfoot. Therefore- do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. This interpretation of verse 6 fits snugly into the context of the preceding verses. Any attempt to make it apply to not offering the Gospel to "pigs" in case we get hurt by them would seem out of context- and contrary to the spirit of taking the Gospel to all men without discrimination, and never holding back in sharing the Gospel from fear that we might get beat up for it.

7:7 *Ask and it shall be given you*- The connections within the Sermon surely send us back to Mt. 5:42 "Give to him that asks". The same Greek words are used. Our responsiveness to others will be reflected in God's responsiveness to us. And yet the Lord's style throughout the sermon is to elevate the natural onto a higher, spiritual plane. This is not a blank cheque promise, as is clear from both personal experience and Bible teaching. What we can be utterly assured of being given is God's grace and salvation. The Lord surely foresaw that the initial mental objection to His words would be 'But that's not true! I don't get everything I ask for, and neither did many Bible characters!'. But He wanted us to therefore think further as to what He might be really saying- and what He is saying is that forgiveness and salvation will surely be given to whoever asks. These things are summarized in 7:11 as God for sure giving "good things to them that ask Him". The parallel Lk. 11:13 summarizes those "good things" as "the Holy Spirit". The power of spiritual victory, the real way to holiness in practice, a spiritual mind, unity through forgiveness with God's mind / spirit, is assured to those who simply ask for it in faith. Seeking and finding, knocking on the door and it being opened, are likewise metaphors elsewhere used for God's assured positive response to our spiritual requests. John's equivalent to this part of the Sermon is perhaps the Lord's assurance that He will definitely *give* "living water" to whoever *asks* Him (Jn. 4:10); and the frequent references to us being given "the Holy Spirit" or whatever we ask in His Name if it results in the Father being glorified (Jn. 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26). The letter of

James is full of reference to the Sermon, and his allusion to 'ask and you will be given' is that if any man ask for *wisdom*, he will be given it (James 1:5,6), but a man will *not* be given things if he asks for material things to fulfil his own natural desires (James 4:2,3). It's as if James is answering the primitive objection: 'Jesus said if you ask, you will be given- but I asked for stuff and never got it'. And his answer is that the blank cheque promise is obviously about asking for spiritual things, not material things. 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 likewise speak of receiving whatever we ask- in the context of saying that we can look forward to the day of judgment and be confident of acceptance there. God is willing and eager to save us, as the whole wonder of the crucifixion makes clear. If we ask for forgiveness, salvation and the strength to be spiritual, then He has promised to give those things to us. The wonder of that means that any attempt to try to as it were extort material blessing from God is sadly inappropriate and will not enter the mind of those who are rejoicing in His salvation.

Seek and you shall find- As David "found" God through experiencing His forgiveness, so can "every one that is Godly" today (Ps. 32:6). It is quite possible that "seek and you shall find" was uttered by the Lord with his mind on Ps. 32:6 and David's experience. After all, we cannot expect this to be a blank cheque offer, that whatever we seek for we must receive. But if these words are an allusion to David's seeking and finding forgiveness in Ps. 32:6, then the promise is more realistic. If we seek for forgiveness and a living relationship with God, then we have this unconditional promise that we *will* find this. Yet in a sense, the time when we will ultimately find God will be at the judgment: we will "find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. 1:18), so that "ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless" (2 Pet. 3:14). We will find God, as He will find us, in that great moment of consummation; "for then shall (we) know (God), even as also (we) are known" by Him (1 Cor. 13:12;). Then we will "be *found* in him... that I may (then) *know* him" (Phil. 3:9,10). Yet David says that after forgiveness, we can find and know God. It is as if whenever we sin, we in a sense face our judgment seat. And the knowledge and 'finding' of God which we will then enjoy should be prefigured in our present experience of forgiveness. Should we not therefore pray for forgiveness with the intensity with which we would at the judgment, if we were then offered the chance to do so?
The 'seeking' which is in view is clearly of spiritual things. Not long previously in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same word in encouraging us to above all "seek the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 6:33). And now He is encouraging us that if we seek it, we will 'find' it- the word for "find" is elsewhere translated "obtain". If we really want the things of the Kingdom and to eternally be in that environment- we will be. The Lord Jesus Himself went out seeking for goodly pearls- and found them (Mt. 13:45,46). He goes seeking His sheep- and finds it (Mt. 18:12,13). He "found" faith in a Gentile (Mt. 8:10), He was as the woman who sought

and found her precious coin (Lk. 15:8,9). Our seeking the things of the Kingdom is therefore not merely our personal seeking a place in its future establishment upon earth. We can seek the progress of the Kingdom principles which comprise the reign and kingship of God on earth right now. Part of that is in seeking men and women to submit to that Kingship / Kingdom. And that too shall ultimately succeed, as the Lord Jesus demonstrated in His own life despite so many setbacks and failures in response to Him. 'But nobody's interested!' is really the cry of unbelief in this promise. If we are seeking for men and women to submit to the things of God's Kingdom, then we shall find them- even if they may not join our denomination or agree totally with all of our theology.

Knock and it shall be opened to you- This again is the language of preaching. For Paul appears to allude to it three times in speaking of how doors of opportunity have been opened for him in the work of the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). The implication is surely that he had knocked in prayer, and the doors had been opened. If we pray for opportunities to preach, to save people (rather than spending our mental energy on condemning our brethren, in the context of :6), then God will respond. According to our principle of letting the Sermon interpret itself, it may be that the idea of the door being opened looks back to Mt. 6:6- in prayer, we are to shut our door and pray. And our knocking means that the door is opened. The particular metaphor of knocking upon a door and it being opened is used in Lk. 12:36 about the Lord knocking on our door at the second coming, and us opening; yet He stands today and knocks at the door, and we are to open to Him (Rev. 3:20). The point is surely that our relationship with Him is mutual, we knock and He opens, He knocks and we open. And at the last day, tragically too late, the rejected knock and the door will not be opened to them (Lk. 13:25). Their knocking is a desperate plea for salvation. But if we ask for it in this life- we shall receive it. So the metaphor speaks of seeking salvation and a relationship with the Lord in this life, but in context of the rest of the verse it also refers to our desire for others to have the door opened to them. John's equivalent to all this is perhaps His description of the Lord Jesus as the door, through whom any man may enter in to salvation. It's the same idea- the door is easily opened in this life, indeed the implication is that Jesus is effectively an open door for all who believe in Him.

7:8 *For everyone that asks receives, and he that seeks finds, and to him that knocks it shall be opened*- Note that the first two clauses [asking and seeking] are in the present tense. If we ask and seek for spiritual things, we shall receive them. But the metaphor of knocking and opening I suggested on 7:7 has a specific reference to seeking salvation at the last day. Hence the Lord uses the future tense. His repetition of what He has said in 7:7 is to drive home the wonder of it all. That if we ask for salvation, for ourselves as well as opportunities for others to have it, for the extension of God's Kingdom and glory- we really will receive it.

The other couplets use the same Greek words as in 7:7 (seek... find; knock... opened). 'Ask' is the same Greek word, but *lambano* is used for 'receive' rather than *didomi* ("given", 7:7). The words 'ask... receive' are to be found again in Jn. 16:24, where the Lord says that in the era of the comforter, whatever is asked for in His Name will be received. This would not be the only time that the Sermon appears to look ahead to the promises of the Comforter era- see on 5:4. James 4:3 continues James' commentary on the Sermon by saying that his readership asked and did not receive (same Greek words) because they asked for the wrong things from the wrong motives. He was correcting the impression some had taken that the Lord was offering a blank cheque for anything. Our commentary so far has shown that the Lord is promising salvation and the things connected with the extension of His Kingdom principles in our lives and those of others.

7:9 *Which one of you*- The Lord was addressing the disciples in Matthew's record of the Sermon. We can imagine Him looking around at each of them.

If his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?- Ask... give are the same words as in 7:7. The Lord sensed that His promise of Divine response to prayer for salvation would be so hard for them to accept. He is here persuading them by all manner of methods to simply accept that reality. We are God's children, and He will not be cruel to us. It would be unnatural and counter-instinctive for Him to not save us. For His is the Kingdom- therefore He desires to give it to us, He designed it for us.

The point has been made that loaves of bread looked like stones, just as there were some fish (similar to eels) caught in the sea of Galilee which looked like snakes (7:10). This surely played a part in the Lord's temptation to turn the stones of the wilderness into bread (Mt. 4:3). The similarity of the Aramaic words for bread and stone would have strengthened the connection. The simple message is that God will not play a cruel trick on us- because He is our loving Father. The Lord sensed human scepticism about God's simple offer of salvation. It is simply there- for all who will trust Him in a simple, child-like way. Perhaps the stone is to be connected with how the same word is used for the millstone of condemnation in Mk. 9:42 and Rev. 18:21, and "the stone of stumbling" in 1 Pet. 2:8. If we seek the bread of the Kingdom (a common Jewish concept at the time, Lk. 14:15), God will not condemn us. Note how the Lord spoke of salvation and relation with Him as "the children's bread" (Mt. 15:26), the bread of salvation given (*didomi* as in Mt. 7:7) freely (Jn. 6:32). The Lord saw to the essence of human fear- of Divine condemnation, that instead of the children's bread we would be given the stone of condemnation. One reason for the crucifixion was in order to try to openly persuade the world of God's grace- that it is for real. The Lord's

teaching here signals one of man's greatest difficulties: to believe in God's grace. To accept His desire and passion to save us.

The *giving* of bread to us by Jesus at the breaking of bread (*lambano* again, as in 7:8) is surely an acted parable of His utter commitment to indeed give us the bread we seek above all things (Mt. 26:26). Earlier in the Sermon, the Lord had used the same words to teach us to do just this: "Give us this day our daily bread". So He clearly intends us to see ourselves as the hungry little child, asking his daddy for bread. And surely God will not disappoint. The prayer will be answered.

7:10 *Or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent?*
- Lk. 11:11 labours the point: "If he ask a fish, will he *for a fish* give him a serpent?". The Lord is penetrating deep into the psychology of His people. We fear that the promised salvation may only be an appearance. And we are being shown here that that is to effectively accuse God of a cruel trick. At what stage the fish became a symbol of Christianity is not clear (there is a distinct similarity in sound between the Aramaic for 'Jesus' and for 'fish', something like 'Iisus' and 'Ikfus'), but the combination of fish and serpent tempt us to interpret this as also having the sense: Do you think that Christianity, the whole offer of the Kingdom I am making, is really such a cruel trick that it's really the serpent, the symbol of evil incarnate? Because that really is how it would have to be. It's either that, or gloriously true. And if we accept God as our loving Father, then with childlike faith we must also believe that His offer of salvation is simply true for us- if we ask. Again we see a connection with earlier teaching in the Sermon; for the Lord had taught His people to pray to "Our Father". Like all of the Lord's prayer, that is harder to pray than might first appear. Because if He really is our loving Heavenly Father, then we are to believe that if we ask Him for salvation and the things of His Kingdom, we shall surely receive.

7:11 *If you then, being evil*- This record of the Sermon was addressed to the disciples. Did the Lord consider them to 'be evil'? The only other time we encounter the phrase "being evil" is again on the Lord's lips and again in Matthew: "O generation of vipers, how can you, *being evil*, speak good things?" (Mt. 12:34). He may have the sense that 'Even the worst Pharisees have a soft spot for their little boys and would never play a cruel trick on them- so do you think God will do that to you?'. The sentence opens with the particle *ei*, and it would be justifiable to translate this 'Whether' or 'Even if' instead of "if". Even if they were as evil as the very worst sinners, they would still give their child bread rather than a stone. The logic is very powerful. If we believe God is basically good, then seeing even wicked people would not play a cruel trick on their kiddies, how much more would God not do that to us His beloved children, whom we address as "Our Father"?

Know how to give- Now the Lord moves beyond simply teaching that God will give us daily bread and salvation if we ask. He alludes here to how a father, even a man who is otherwise evil, has an intuitive sense as to what present his child would like. Paul Tournier's insightful book *The Meaning of Gifts* demonstrates that the desire to give gifts is psychologically part of 'love'. God knows what ultimately we would love so much. And yet, as the James 4:3 allusion demonstrates, it is not material things in this life which are in view here. God knows us and He knows all our possible futures, our eternal possibilities throughout His Kingdom. And He will surely give us that. He has created for us the most wonderful things to lavish upon us. To think that in any sense God is a 'hard man' is to tragically misunderstand. That persuasion only really comes from a lack of basic faith in Him and His grace.

Good gifts to your children- The emphasis upon "good" continues the laboured addressing of our fear that God just might not be 'good' and we might get a serpent rather than a fish from Him. The point is laboured because it is such a powerful array of step logic- if it's not all a cruel trick, then it is all wonderfully true. The parallel record speaks of "the Holy Spirit" instead of "good gifts", and there is a clear connection with Eph. 4:8: "He gave gifts unto men", referring to the Holy Spirit. All the Greek words there are used here in Mt. 7:11,12. On one level, there is a prediction of the Comforter, as elsewhere in the Sermon (see on 7:8). And yet the principle appears to be clearly that in general terms, God will not only give us daily bread and future salvation, but so much more besides- in spiritual terms. Whilst the form of manifestation of Spiritual gifts has changed since the first century, the principle remains- that God will give His Spirit to those who are poor in spirit and who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

How much more shall your Father who is in heaven- Many times the idea of "Your father which is in heaven" is used in the context of faith in prayer being answered (Mt. 7:11; 18:19; 21:22; Mk. 11:24; Jn. 14:13; James 1:5,6,17 etc.). It's as if the reality of God actually existing in Heaven in a personal form should be a powerful focus for our prayers.

Give good things to them that ask him- Answered prayer is paralleled with being given the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). The prayer of the Philippians for Paul is likewise linked with "the supply of the Spirit" (Phil. 1:19). These passages therefore teach that having spiritual fruit is associated with answered prayer (Jn. 15:16), as is the possession of the Comforter (Jn. 14:14; 16:24 are in this context). Many passages imply that God's hearing of our prayers is proportionate to His perception of our spirituality. He will not respond to the prayer of those whose way of life is

contrary to His word: Ps. 66:18; Pro. 1:24-28; Is. 1:15; 59:2; Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:10-12; 29:12; Lam. 3:8,44; Mal. 1:7-9; Mk. 11:25; Jn. 9:31; James 1:6,7; 4:3; 1 Pet. 3:7,12. But He will hear the prayer of the righteous; and 'hearing' is an idiom for 'answering', it doesn't just mean that God takes cognizance of the fact the righteous have prayed: 2 Kings 19:20; Mt. 7:7; 18:19,20; Jn. 14:14.

7:12 *Therefore*- The reason why we should do to others as we would like them to do to us flow straight on from :11. But what is the connection of thought? Perhaps the Lord is changing tack here and introducing His concluding summary for the Sermon, which is about 'doing' what He has been teaching. The same Greek for 'do' here in :12 is translated 'bring forth' or 'do' in the distinct seven-fold exhortation to do' which we find in 7:17,18,19,21,22,24,26. The Greek *oun* translated "therefore" is of wide meaning, and could just as comfortably introduce a new section rather than conclude the section about judging which began in 7:1. It can have the sense of 'truly' or 'certainly', as if introducing a major truth. But it may be that the context of judgment, so clearly established in the preceding 11 verses, is not out of the Lord's mind in His use of the word *oun*, "Therefore...". If we condemn others, if we drag them before God's judgment because we refuse to forgive them, then we must consider: Do I want others to do that to me? For we have all sinned and upset others to the point some struggle to forgive us. As we judge others, then we shall be judged likewise. If we really hope they have to answer for their sin against us, then perhaps they will have to. And would you like others to take you to the Divine court for your sins?

Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets- This is another way of saying 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. The Greek for 'do to you' recurs in Mt. 18:35 where we read how God shall 'do to you' if you do not forgive your brother. We also find the phrase in Mt. 25:40,45- 'whatever you do' to Christ's brethren, you do to Him and shall receive from Him accordingly. It is true that what goes around, comes around- so it's best to treat others as you would like to be treated. But that kind of truth is expressed in almost every religious and cultural system of the world. My sense is that the Lord is not merely repeating conventional, folksy wisdom, but rather is elevating it to a far higher and more deeply internal, spiritual level. For this is His style throughout the Sermon. The recurrence of the phrase 'whatever you do' in Mt. 25:40,45 teaches that whatever we do (or do not do) to others, we do to Christ personally. And in that dimension of life, the 'come back' of our actions will not simply be in this life, but more importantly, at the last day. Judgment day, either explicitly or implicitly, forms a major theme in the Lord's teaching. If He is indeed teaching that what we do to others is done to Him and therefore will have its response at the day of judgment, rather than merely in this life as folksy wisdom teaches, then indeed we

can understand His comment: "For this is the law and the prophets". The law and the prophets do indeed teach that human behaviour, especially that done to others, shall come to final judgment in the last day. But I would not say that 'what goes around, comes around' is exactly their major and noteworthy theme, true as that bit of folksy wisdom is.

7:13 *Enter in*- The context is quite clear that the Lord means 'enter into the Kingdom' (Mt. 18:3; 19:24; Lk. 18:25). But the question is, whether the Lord speaks of entering into the Kingdom at the last day, or in some sense, in this life. Luke's record of this statement of the Lord is in Lk. 13:24: "Strive to enter in at the narrow gate: for many... will seek to enter in, and shall not be able". This favours a 'last day' interpretation, for we know from the parable of the foolish girls that some will seek to enter at the time of the Lord's return and be unable to. Some other usages of the phrase 'enter in' imply the same (Mt. 5:20; 18:3; 25:10; Acts 14:22; Heb. 3:19; 4:6; Rev. 22:14). However, John's equivalent of this phrase speaks of the believer 'entering in' to a relationship and salvation with the Lord right now (Jn. 10:9). And other words of the Lord speak of 'entering in' to "life" right now (Mt. 18:3,8,9; 19:17). The guests enter in to the Messianic banquet now, before the Master comes, Mt. 22:12; the Scribes stopped men entering the Kingdom right now, Mt. 23:13; by birth of water and spirit we enter the Kingdom, Jn. 3:5; the Gentiles enter in every time one is converted (Rom. 11:25); a promise is given us of entering the promised rest, but we who believe do right now 'enter in' to that rest (Heb. 4:1,3). And yet we are to labour in order to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:11). The rich man must shed the load of his wealth and enter in- now (Mt. 19:23,24). For judgment day is too late to shed the load of wealth. We can therefore conclude that by following the Lord's teaching now, we enter into His Kingdom; insofar as His Kingship is exercised over us, we are His Kingdom, those whom He is King over. The outcome of the judgment day is not therefore some terrible unknown to us if we are in our hearts and lives clearly under His Kingship in this life. Our passage into the future Kingdom of God on earth will be a seamless continuation of our present experience.

By the narrow gate- The Greek could imply 'made narrow'. The Lord repeats the term in :14, emphasizing how narrow is the entrance. The contrast is with the wide gate and broad road. The idea of two gates facing a man was surely an allusion to the gates of Jerusalem, which had a main gate, through which camels could pass, and the small gate through which only pedestrians could enter. This leads me to favour the traditional interpretation of entering through into the Kingdom through the eye of a needle (Mt. 19:24; Lk. 18:25)- the rich must unload their camels of all their wealth and squeeze through the small needle gate. The narrowness of the gate is because it is so hard for people to give up their materialism. They desire spirituality, to enter in, but not without their present attachment to wealth. Remember the Lord was primarily and

initially addressing the poor. The desire for wealth, and especially mental concern about it, is the main reason why people do not grasp the way to the Kingdom. That needs some sober reflection, because our natural assumption is that warnings against materialism do not apply to *me*. Whenever we find ourselves making such an assumption, that Biblical warnings do not apply to us, we need to really ensure that we are thinking straight and that our self-deceiving flesh is not kidding us that we simply don't have to take the Lord at His word.

For wide is the gate and broad is the way- Surely the Lord at this stage in His ministry had in mind the way that John the Baptist had come to prepare a "way" for Him (Mt. 3:3). By admitting that this way would only be found by a minority of Israel, the Lord was perhaps tacitly recognizing that John's attempt to prepare a way over which the King of glory could come to Jerusalem had not succeeded.

That leads- Apago is used another 14 times in the New Testament. Ten of these specifically refer to being 'lead away to death', the majority referring to the leading away of the Lord Jesus to death on the cross. 7:14 contrasts being lead to destruction with being lead to life; but the way to life is through the death of the cross. We either bear our iniquities and their result (Lev. 19:8), or we bear the cross of the Lord Jesus. It's a burden either way. The Lord played on this fact when He spoke of there being two roads, one which *leads* to death, and the other to life (Mt. 7;13,14). The Greek word translated 'lead' is in fact part of an idiom: to be led is an idiom for 'to be put to death' (cp. Jn. 18:13; 21:18). Indeed, the very word translated “lead" in Mt. 7:14 is rendered "be put to death" (Acts 12:19). So, we're led out to death either way, as the criminal made his 'last walk' to the cross. We're either led out and put to death for the sake of eternal life, or for eternal death. The logic is glaring. The Hebrew of Ps. 139:24 reveals a telling play on words which makes the same point: "Wicked way" is rendered in the AVmg. as 'way of pain'; the way of wickedness is itself the way of pain.

To destruction- The Greek is used another 19 times in the New Testament, nearly always with reference to condemnation at the last day. We are making the choice now- condemnation, or the path to the cross, to death, and thence to eternal life. The essence of the future judgment is before us daily; "we make the answer now".

And many are they that enter in thereby- The same word used about the "many" who were now listening to Him teach (Mt. 4:25; 8:1). Surely He was saying that the Kingdom road is not found by many. And yet we compare this with the promise that Abraham's seed will become many. Compared to the wonder of salvation, we are indeed "many", but relative to the many who do not respond, we are a minority.

7:14 *For narrow is the gate and straight the road that leads to life*- "The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns; but the path of the upright is a highway" (Proverbs 15:19 NIV). The road of the wise is described as a highway in Proverbs 16:17 too; and the way of the wicked is also strewn with difficult obstacles in Proverbs 22:5; "Whose ways are crooked, and they froward in their paths" (2:15). There is probably a designed contrast between this and the way the Lord described the road to the Kingdom as made narrow, and the way to death as a wide, broad highway (Mt. 7:13,14); the Proverbs seem to say the opposite. The answer may be that Proverbs is presenting God's viewpoint; in ultimate reality, the way to the Kingdom is wide and clear and easier, better marked, than the road to death. But the Lord turned all this round, because He appreciated that from *our* perspective, this wouldn't be the case. We will think that the way to the Kingdom is made narrow (Gk.) and hard, restricted; whilst the road to death seems so wide and obviously right. The Lord Jesus based many of His parables on the Proverbs, and His words concerning the wide road to destruction and the narrow road to the Kingdom (Mt. 7:13,14) are surely based on the frequent descriptions of the ways / great way to life, and that to death, which Proverbs so often mentions. The road / way of life which we are on is really leading somewhere. "The way of the wicked" is opposed to the way of him "that followeth after righteousness" (Proverbs 15:9 cp. seeking the Kingdom and God's righteousness, Mt. 5:47).

But few- See on "many" in 7:13. We find another contrast between the few and the many when we read that only "few" will be chosen from the many who are called (Mt. 20:16; 22:14). The implication seems to be that out of the "many" who were then listening to the Lord's teaching ("many" in 7:13 is s.w. Mt. 4:25; 8:1), only a minority would enter into life. There seems fair Biblical reason to think that the community of God's people are a minority in the world, and yet within them, only a minority will finally choose the way of salvation. This helps make sense of why all the faithful lament the weak spiritual state of the church communities surrounding them. And recognizing that this is a general principle shields us from the disillusion which arises from having started out believing that the majority of our community are genuine believers. We have no option but to assume they will be saved, for we cannot condemn any individual; but on the other hand, we are to recognize that on a statistical level, only a few of those within the community will be saved. The majority of those who were 'baptized' in the Red Sea did not make it to God's Kingdom, and this fact is used in 1 Cor. 10 and Hebrews 3 and 4 to warn us not to assume that the ratio will be much higher in the Christian community.

Are they that find it- This is clearly to be connected with the Lord's

teaching a few verses earlier that whoever seeks will find (Mt. 7:7,8). He is balancing out the statistical difficulty of salvation with the fact that those who want to be there just have to ask- and they will be. The promise that whoever seeks / asks will find / receive is not a blank cheque about material things, but rather is a promise of entry into the Kingdom. All those who truly love the Lord's appearing will enter the Kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1,8). It is so simple that it is hard to believe- those who truly seek to be in the Kingdom, will find a place therein. Note how the Lord here speaks of finding the way that leads to life, elsewhere He speaks of finding life (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). This is typical of the now / but not yet teaching of the New Testament. We have the eternal life in the sense that we are living that kind of life which we shall eternally live, we have entered the way to life; but we are still mortal and await the physical change to immortality.

7:15 *Beware*- Clearly the prohibition against judging others in the sense of condemning them (7:1) doesn't mean that we can't form a valid opinion about someone's genuineness as a teacher.

Of false prophets- *Pseudo-prophetes* means that these people are not spiritual at all, they are faking it, pseudo- prophets. To be such a fake, a *pseudo*, is not the same as being a believer who has failed in behaviour at times or who has some Biblical interpretations which we don't personally agree with.

Who come to you- The Greek phrase likely means 'Appear to you'.

In sheep's clothing- Dressed as if they are Jesus?

But inwardly- Given our inability to judge the inner thoughts of others, and the clear prohibition against judging to condemnation in the context (7:1), perhaps this is the Lord's comment upon them, and is not meant to be an invitation to us to claim to read the inward thoughts of others? However the next verse goes on to say that we can observe their fruits, and it is by their fruits that *we* are to discern them. But the Lord discerns them by their inward thoughts, which are visible to Him. Thereby His position on these false prophets becomes our position too- but we arrive there by different routes. We are to observe their fruits, whereas He looks upon their hearts. The Lord uses the same word several times to tell the Pharisees that *inwardly* or 'within' they are full of unspirituality (Mt. 23:25,27,28; Lk. 11:39). This suggests that His warning against "false prophets" is a warning against the Jewish leadership. But He uses the language of 'prophets' because this fits in with the Old Testament theme of false and true prophets. Just as the people had to discern between those two groups, so now, in an era when there were no more prophets in the Old Testament sense, God's people had to beware of imposters like

the Pharisees. They were false prophets, false speakers of God's word, in that they had effectively elevated their interpretations of God's word [the *halakah*] to the same level as God's actual inspired word.

Are ravening wolves- The Greek word is always translated elsewhere as 'extortioner'. The Pharisees are clearly in view here, and yet the Pharisee of Lk. 18:11 thanked God with the same word, that he was not an 'extortioner' (Lk. 18:11). The Pharisee didn't see his own sin. The Lord saw their hearts and saw that they were extortioners, but they thanked God that they were not. This is an essay in the blindness of humans to their own sins, and in our need to see ourselves as the Lord sees us, with His eyes and from His perspective. This is the essence of self-examination. The motive of the Pharisees / false prophets was clearly financial gain. This is pinpointed by the Lord as the fundamental reason for their false prophecies, for their external appearance of spirituality- it was because they wanted cash out of people. This was and is clearly deeply upsetting to the Lord.

We've seen that these false prophets were specifically the Pharisees in the Lord's immediate context. When He warns the disciples that He is sending them out as sheep amongst wolves (Mt. 10:16), He is clearly alluding to His teaching here- that the Pharisees appear as sheep, but are as wolves. The implication could be that there would be fake disciples of Jesus, and that the real opposition to the work of the disciples would be the wolves of the Pharisees (see on 'The Jewish Satan' in my *The Real Devil*). This clearly happened after the Lord's death, where the Judaist plot to destroy Paul's preaching of Christianity involved Judaist 'false brethren in Christ' entering in to the flock as wolves (Gal. 2:4). In Jn. 10:12, the Lord speaks of how He as the good shepherd would give His life fighting the wolf so that the sheep might be saved; the implication is that the wolf killed Him. His death was at the hands of the Jewish leadership. Wolves don't usually kill men. This is an element of unreality to highlight the point- that legalism may not appear too bad nor too ultimately dangerous; but in fact it is, and was what led to the death of God's Son. Paul's warning that wolves would enter the flock (Acts 20:29) likewise came true in the Judaist false teachers who entered in to the ecclesias and destroyed so much, both spiritually and doctrinally. I have shown elsewhere that the roots of the false thinking which led to later false doctrines such as the Trinity actually began in Judaist ideas which entered Christianity. From our standpoint today, we can take the point that the major enemy of the Gospel will be legalism and posturing religious leaders.

7:16 *By their fruits you shall know them*- Perhaps the emphasis was upon the "you". The Lord knows the evil hearts of these people- but we can't

see their hearts, and so *we* shall know them by their external fruits. The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles?
- The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach. And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publicly on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn in 7:1.

He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.
The Lord puts it slightly another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may *say* to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception ['eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as ones' spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, disaffirming them as believers, disaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade… until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this…" (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words cannot reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come?

Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

7:17 *Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit but the corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit*- See on :18.

7:18 *A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit*- This appears to belabour the point made in the preceding verses. But the Lord so wishes to drive the point home- that fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analysed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

7:19 *Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire*- The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now (Lk. 12:49). The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "*is* hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be 'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4). The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire is surely referring to the words of Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5); where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because the idols will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

7:20 *Therefore by their fruits you shall know them*- The belaboured repetition of the point (see on 7:17,18) is surely because we will have a strong temptation to undervalue spiritual fruit, and to seek to judge others in terms of their traditions, culture and specific interpretations- rather than by their fruit.

7:21 *Not everyone that says to me: Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven*- Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom ("in that day", :22). The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

But he that pleases my Father who is in heaven- Or, "does the will". Allowing the Sermon to interpret itself, we see an obvious connection with our prayer asking "Your will be done" (Mt. 6:10). If that request was just

asking for God to do His will, it would be easy to pray and also somewhat meaningless. But the connection with Mt. 7:21 means that we are asking that *we* do God's will. And doing His will is difficult, slow progress, building on a rock- as the rest of Matthew 7 records. The Lord's prayer in Gethsemane demonstrates the difficulty of praying for the Father's will to be done in our lives- prayed there with sweat like drops of blood (Mt. 26:42). So we are to pray for strength to do God's will, for spiritual strength to live obediently to the principles of the Sermon. 1 Jn. 5:14 encourages us that if we ask for anything "according to [*kata*] His will, He hears us". But asking *kata* His will could just as well be translated 'in order to fulfil'. If we want strength to do His will in practice, He will give it to us. And His will is expressed here in Matthew 5-7 quite clearly.

"The will of My Father in Heaven" is a fairly common phrase with the Lord (Mt. 12:50; 18:14; John's equivalent seems to be 'to do the will of Him that sent Me', Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38,39,40). The idea seems to be that we on earth can do the will of Him who is in one sense so far away from us, "in Heaven"; and thereby collapse that distance between us.

7:22 *Many*- The Greek often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

Will say to Me in that day- Judgment will be a process, with the rejected initially protesting, seeking to change the Lord's mind- and then slinking away in shame. Nobody will be passive in that day. The only thing important will be acceptance at His hand and a place in the Kingdom. We will come to that position either by loving obedience to His ways in this life- or all too late, in condemnation. The logic is powerful- we must choose that desire for the Kingdom life *now* as the dominant emotion, overarching all our emotions, decision making and formation of our deepest desires.

Lord, Lord- Mt. 7:22 = 1 Cor. 13:2. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last

day. The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying “Lord, Lord”; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say “Lord, Lord” but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will show Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: “If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

Did we not prophesy in your name- When we consider the Lord's teaching of Mt. 7:22,23 and 25:42-44 together, He's saying that those rejected at the day of judgment will be so on account of their *omissions*- hence their surprise, and anger because they knew that they had *done* good works; they thought that what they had *committed* was morally acceptable to God, and this would usher them into the Kingdom. But their sins of *omission* cost them the Kingdom. The mention of prophesying must be seen in the context of the Lord's warning in 7:15 about *false* prophets. To claim to have spoken / prophesied in His Name (cp. 'in sheep's clothing', appearing as Jesus) implies these people had considered themselves followers of Jesus in this life.

And in your name cast out demons and in your name do many mighty works?- The possession of Holy Spirit gifts which enabled healings and miracles to be performed was no guarantee of final acceptance at the last day. Pentecostal theology needs to take note of this- for the power to do miracles is simply not any guarantee of salvation, as they wrongly suppose. And we who live in an era when the miraculous gifts have been withdrawn can still take a powerful lesson- no matter how dramatically we may be a channel for God's activity in the lives of others, this is irrelevant to our final salvation. The essence of the life in Christ, the life of the

Kingdom, is internal spiritual mindedness. The contrast is between 'doing' wonderful works and 'doing' (the same Greek word is used in :21) the will of the Father. The language of 'doing the Father's will' is used about the Lord's life and final death on the cross. To be as Him, to give our deepest life as He did, is not the same as doing external works for others.

7:23 *And then will I tell them*- The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46). The Lord will "profess" to them that He doesn't know them and they must depart from Him; but Strong understands the Greek to mean 'to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent'. The Lord will be agreeing with them, that they are worthy of condemnation. They will have condemned themselves, and the Lord will simply confirm this to them in His final verdict. If we are ashamed of Him now, we will be ashamed from before Him then (1 Jn. 2:28), and He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). Every time we are asked to stand up for Him and His words in the eyes of men, we are as it were living out our future judgment.

I never knew you- "Many" will be rejected at the judgment seat because they don't *know* the Lord Jesus Christ; they never had a personal relationship with Jesus, even though they have experienced answered prayer, done miracles, worked for their Lord etc. (Mt. 7:22,23; 1 Cor. 13). They will have built a spiritual house, but on sand. It isn't difficult to be a good Christian outwardly. But to *know* the Lord Jesus? That's another question. The Greek for "never" means literally 'never at any time'. The course of their lives was such that there had never been a time when He 'knew' them. We rather expect Him to say '*You* never knew *Me*'. But He says that *He* never knew *them*- because the whole idea of 'knowing' Him is mutual. Insofar as we know Him (in a relational sense), He knows us- and vice versa. We really need to ask whether we are praying to Jesus, talking to Him, 'knowing' Him...

Depart from me- This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19: 'Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment'. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

You that work iniquity- And yet they have just protested all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage (see on "ravening wolves", 7:15). In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him.

Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them (:22)- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

7:24 *Everyone therefore that hears these words of mine- Logos* suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders (Mt. 7:24-27). One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you".

And does them- An echo of :21, he who *does* the will of the Father. The parallel is thus made between the will of the Father, and "these sayings of Mine" in the Sermon. Yet in the Lord's own case, the doing of the Father's will meant the death of the cross. This finally was and is the outcome of living in accordance with the Sermon. This is what it leads to. The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim. 2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly

understanding Him in practical application. How do we hear and do? We are helped to get the answer by considering how Christ elsewhere appealed to people to "Hear *and understand*" (Mt. 15:10). Truly understanding is related to action, 'doing'. In the parable, hearing and doing is like the hard work of digging the foundation on a rock. This is how hard it is to truly understand the words of Christ. Remember how the one talent man also dug into the earth (Mt. 25:18). He did some digging, he did some work. But he failed to truly understand. The very physical action of digging deceived him into thinking he had done enough, as the physical action of building deceived the man who built on earth. Of course we are progressing somewhere spiritually, as we live day by day. But our movement can deceive us.

James clearly alludes to the appeal to not only hear but do: “But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves” (James 1:22). James spells out the problem- we hear the Lord's words and for a moment assent to them- but don't continue to do them in the long term. "The word" is paralleled by James with "the perfect law of freedom". “But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25). The term "perfect law of freedom" is hard to interpret, and it seems to be in contrast with how the New Testament elsewhere speaks of the Mosaic law as being a form of bondage, with Christ's teaching as the way to freedom. I would suggest that this "perfect law of freedom" refers to the Sermon on the Mount (see on 7:1), perhaps specifically to the challenge to be perfect (Mt. 5:48); the Sermon, as we showed in commenting on 5:1, was the Lord's equivalent to the Mosaic Law. The Sermon would've been memorized and recited by the vast mass of early Christians who were illiterate. And James is urging them to not merely encounter the words and nod approvingly at them, nor even merely recite them- but continuing in actually doing them. And this of course is the challenge to us too, assailed as we are in our generation by too many words, to the point that we can easily give a passing 'like' to them, and yet live on uninfluenced.

Shall be like- As in :27, "shall be likened unto". The future tenses imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "*is* likened",

present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome of the final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

A wise man who built his house upon the rock- This is exactly what the Lord Himself is doing (Mt. 16:18; 26:61). There is a mutuality between the Lord and us. We build upon a rock, and He builds us upon a rock. We ourselves build, and yet we are "built up a spiritual house" by God (1 Pet. 2:5; note how Peter goes right on to speak of the Jews as foolish builders in 1 Pet. 2:7; he surely had the Lord's parable of the two types of builder in mind). Both men *built* in that both men *heard* the Lord's sayings. We are all making progress on our spiritual journey, for good or bad. There's no way to just take a break from the journey. We are building, hearing the Lord's will- but the question is, where is our foundation. The fundamental core, the dominant desire, of the Lord's people is Him. For the rock is clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus ("that rock was Christ", 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8 s.w.). On one hand, the Lord teaches that obedience to His sayings in practice is building upon a rock. And yet the rock is Him. He was the word made flesh, the perfect fulfilment and example of obedience to His sayings. To follow the Sermon fully means becoming as Him. And yet the judgment of the last day will not be a simple test of legalistic obedience. It will be a revelation of where our core foundation, our dominant desire, really is. Many people living in this postmodern, passionless world will have to think long and hard before answering the question: 'What is your dominant desire?'. Short term things such as getting a qualification, a career, a particular level or form of wealth, buying a particular house, marrying a particular person, some specific success for our children... all these things fade from dominance in the course of a person's life. Many people simply don't have a dominant desire. The difference with true believers is that we do- and it is 'Christ', Him as a person, the things of His eternal Kingdom. This perhaps more than anything else is the simple difference between the true believer and all other people. This is why there is a simple test as to whether a person is a genuine Christian or not- and it's 'fruit', as the Lord has just previously explained. The difference is clear. The dominant desire of a true Christian is manifest and cannot be hid.

Comparing with the parallel Lk. 6:48 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool

built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day (Mt. 7:21,22).

To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave, thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's

tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10). The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted Biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

7:25 *And the rain descended and the floods came*- The allusion is clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do he will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we

can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

The flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock (v.49) is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self- gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

"Came" is the same word in the model prayer- we pray for God's Kingdom to "come" (Mt. 6:10), but again we find it hard to pray that prayer if we understand it. We are praying for the storm of judgment to come and beat upon our house.

And the winds blew- The disciples surely recalled the Lord's teaching

when they were on the sea of Galilee with winds blowing so strongly that they were going to drown (s.w. Mt. 8:26; 14:24; Jn. 6:18 s.w. 'blow'). Those incidents they would've understood as a foretaste of judgment and condemnation- out of which they were saved only by the presence and grace of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the winds refer here to the Angels who will play a major part in our judgment process; for God makes His Angels winds (Ps. 104:4).

And beat upon that house- The Greek for 'to beat upon' is used seven other times in the NT- and always about falling down at the feet of the Lord Jesus. We either do that in our desperation today, or His judgment shall fall upon us in the last day. There is good reason to think that our meeting of the Lord will not be just to receive a yes/no decision. The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment (Mt. 7:27). If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44).

And it did not collapse- The same house stood before and after judgment. See on 7:24 "his house". The same word is used of how we desperate sinners in this life fall down before Jesus in confession that we have sinned and we dearly wish to do something about that debt (Mt. 16:26). We either do that, or we shall fall down in condemnation at the last day, with the same realization (Mt. 18:26). Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

For it was founded upon the rock- Surely alluded to by Paul when he teaches that we must be grounded / have a foundation in love (Eph. 3:17), in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Col. 1:23). And God Himself has the ability to "settle" or ground / foundation us (1 Pet. 5:10 s.w.)- if we so wish to have the things of the Lord Jesus, His love and His Kingdom, as the dominant, master passion of our lives, then God will confirm us in that.

7:26 *And everyone that hears these words of mine and does not obey them, shall be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand-* The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10;

Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

7:27 *And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it collapse*- The Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

And great was its collapse- A common figure for condemnation (Mt. 15:14; Acts 5:5; Rom. 11:11,22; 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:8,12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). Condemnation will be tragic- "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; in Luke, these words of Jesus (Lk. 6:47) are set against the background of Lk. 6:27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. Lk. 6:41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be destroyed. The Greek for “many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ,

hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

7:28 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words that the crowds*- Although the Lord started teaching only His disciples, leaving the multitude at the bottom of the mountain (Mt. 5:1), clearly many of them came up to hear Him over the course of His discourse- for in Mt. 8:1 we learn that the multitudes returned from up the mountain.

Were astonished at his teaching- The sense of reality commented upon in :27 left the people with utter astonishment. Never before nor since have the eternal issues of existence been stated so clearly and compellingly.

7:29 *For he taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes*- It was exactly because the Lord Jesus had the power to give or take eternity that He had this authority which the people sensed.

CHAPTER 8

8:1 See on 7:28.
And when he had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him- The word for "crowds" is used 48 times in Matthew alone. The verbal picture is powerful- the Lord Jesus at the head of a multitude, with them, followed by them, and yet so alone...

8:2 *And a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying*- The Greek literally means to bow or crouch. Perhaps it is being used here in that literal sense, inviting us then to imagine the Lord extending His hand to the kneeling man (8:3). Or the idea could be that the man's worship was not in any external display of respect, but in the fact he believed in the Lord's ability and power to respond to his request. In this case, the man worshipped Jesus *in saying* "If You will, You can...".

Lord, if You desire, You can- The Lord replied that this was indeed His will (8:3). This coincidence of human will with that of our Lord is what fellowship with Him and answered prayer is all about. The phrase "If You will, You can..." is recorded identically in all three of the synoptics (Mk. 1:40; Lk. 5:12), as if they all wished to draw attention to the man's attitude and make an example of it- accepting that the Lord has all power ("can" = *dunamai*), but that our will is not always His.

Make me clean- The leper didn't ask so much for healing as for cleansing. He wanted the healing *so that* he could be accepted into the community of believers in the temple. Our requests for health and healing should likewise be motivated by a desire to use the healed situation in the Lord's service. Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of Christ's exaltation. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it" (L.G. Sargent, *The Gospel Of The Son Of God*, p. 28). The leper lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If thou wilt, *thou canst* [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

8:3 *And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying*- The Lord is described a staggering 28 times in the synoptics as touching people. This was a studied rejection of the false teaching of 'guilt by association' or 'contamination by contact'. More than that, the Lord was at such lengths to identify Himself with suffering people.

I do desire. Be made clean!- In Mt. 10:8 the Lord told the disciples to likewise "cleanse the lepers". Again the Lord is giving the disciples the

work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done in Mt. 8:3. His work was to be theirs. The later NT references to *our* being cleansed by the Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:26; Tit. 2:14; 1 Jn. 1:7,9 etc.) perhaps look back to how the historical Jesus cleansed lepers in Galilee. We are to see ourselves in that isolated and rejected man.

And immediately his leprosy was cleansed- The Greek literally means 'scales' and the same word is used of scales falling from Saul's eyes in Acts 9:18. It could've been any skin disease rather than Hansen's disease.

8:4 And *Jesus said to him: See you tell no one, but go show yourself to the priests and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony to them*- The Lord had told the cured leper to tell no other man but go and offer for his cleansing, in order to make a witness to the priests. All three synoptics record this, as if it made a special impression on everyone (Mt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk. 5:14). It could be that the Lord is using an idiom when He told the leper to tell nobody: 'Go and make a witness *first and foremost* to the priests as opposed to anybody else'. Such was His zeal for their salvation. And the fact that "a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7) shows how this apparently hope-against-hope desire of the Lord for the conversion of His enemies somehow came true. We noted on 8:3 that the work of the priests was to cleanse the leper- but this had been done by the Lord. The man was therefore to show himself to the priests- in order to demonstrate to them that another priest and priesthood was already coming into operation.

8:5 *And when he was entering into Capernaum, there came to him a centurion, begging him*- "There came" is a poor translation. The Greek word is related to that translated 'worship' in 8:2. The parallel is thus drawn between the socially isolated and poverty stricken leper, and the wealthy, respected Centurion. The point is that they both were experiencing the same utter desperation which led them to cast themselves upon the Lord. Social differences are therefore eliminated within the community gathered around Christ- on the basis of our common recognition of our desperation and His unique and sole ability to help and save.

8:6 *Saying: Lord, my servant*- Masters were well known for disregarding the welfare of their slaves, so in the centurion's passionate concern for his slave we have an insight into the nature of this delightful man.

Lies in the house paralysed- The same words recur in 8:14, where Peter's mother also lies at home sick, and the Lord heals her. The centurion's servant and Peter's mother are thus being paralleled- just as in 8:5 the wealthy Centurion and the poor leper are paralleled. The point is being made that many people from very different lives and circumstances had

one thing in common- desperate need for healing and salvation at the hands of the Lord.

Grievously tormented- The same word for 'grievously' is used about the disciples' fear during the storm on the lake (Mt.8:26); the Lord was seeking to educate the twelve by showing them His ability to cure a person in a 'grievous' situation, and then the next day (or later that same day?) giving them the opportunity to themselves be in a 'grievous' situation from which likewise just His word was sufficient to save them. But they failed to see the similarity. And so a bit later, He have them another opportunity to learn from this situation. The servant was "tormented", and the very same Greek word is used about how the disciples "toiled" or were tormented in trying to row their boat in another storm (Mk. 6:48); in Mt. 14:24 we read that their ship was "tossed", or tormented [same word again]. And again, they failed to learn the lesson- that a word from the Lord was sufficient to save them out of 'grievous torment', just as it had done for the centurion's servant. In our struggle to attach meaning to event, we are to likewise perceive how the Lord demonstrates His power in another's life- and then brings us into a situation which in essence is similar, so that we might ourselves experience His power to meet *our* human need. And whether we 'get it' or not, He tends to repeat the lessons, as He did with the disciples.

8:7 *And he said to him: I will come and heal him*- See on 8:9 *Come and he comes.*

8:8 *And the centurion answered and said: Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof*- He was aware that Jews were not supposed to 'come to' or under the roof of a Gentile (Acts 10:28). He was therefore aware that the purpose of God at that time was for Jews rather than Gentiles- his understanding was quite deep. See on 8:9. But the Lord was quite willing to go under the roof a Gentile; that is the significance of the Lord's response that He would come to the sick servant.

But only say the word and my servant shall be healed- He had a deep belief in the power of the Lord's word, and may well be alluding to the unique Hebrew conception of the creation of all things being through the medium of a word spoken. One of Paul's many allusions to the Gospels is in 1 Thess. 1:5, where he observes that the Thessalonians had not heard "the word only" but had had it confirmed by signs and miracles. He seems to be reminding them of the centurion, who believed "the word only" *before* he experienced the healing miracle.

8:9 *For I also am a man under authority*- The centurion had perceived exactly who the Lord Jesus was- a man, who was under (Divine) authority and yet had others beneath *his* authority. And he understand the Lord Jesus as his representative, very similar to him, but with far more power. Admittedly he seems to have misunderstood the issue of demons- he

understood that the Lord could say 'go' to whatever mighty ones [cp. his soldiers] were making his servant sick. Whatever his beliefs about sickness and its cause, he believed the Lord Jesus was far more powerful than whatever was causing it. But the Lord all the same commended the man for his *faith* even if the precise content of that faith was misinformed, and if his way of life as a Roman centurion was not the best way of being a Jesus follower; not to mention that he was a Gentile. This opens a helpful window onto how the Lord feels about those who strongly believe in Him but have their understanding of some details awry.

Come and he comes- The same word just used by the Lord in saying that in response to the centurion's request: "I will come" (8:8). Perhaps the centurion is marvelling at the grace of the fact that he had asked the Son of God to come, and He had come in response...

Having under myself soldiers and I say to one: Go! And he goes. And to another: Come! And he comes. And to my servant: Do this! And he does it- The centurion seems to have believed in demon possession. He understood that his servant was "grievously tormented" by them. He believed that the Lord could cure him, in the same way as he could say to his underlings "go, and he goeth" (Mt. 8:6-10). And so, he implied, couldn't Jesus just say to the demons 'Go!', and they would go, as with the 'demons' in the madman near Gadara? The Lord didn't wheel round and read him a lecture about 'demons don't exist' (although they don't, of course, and it's important to understand that they don't). He understood that this man had faith that He, as the Son of God, had power over these 'demons', and therefore "he marvelled, and said… Verily… I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel". He focused on what faith and understanding the man had. With the height of His spirituality, with all the reason He had to be disappointed in people, the Lord marvelled at a man's faith. It is an essay in how He seized on what genuine faith He found, and worked to develop it, even if there was an element of false understanding in it.

8:10 *When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him*- He admired him [Gk.]. Here we see the humility of the Lord Jesus, that despite His own peerless perfection, He could admire the faith of a man who as a centurion was yet far from His own level of spirituality. Despite His peerless faith, the Lord Jesus marvelled at the extent of other's faith; the Gospels stress how sensitive He was to the faith of others (Mt. 9:2,22,29; 15:28; Mk. 5:34; 10:52; Lk. 7:9,50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42). Yet measured by His standards, they probably hardly knew what faith was. "No, not in Israel" suggests the Lord thought that Israel's faith was something *very* high; when their rejection of Him was the cruellest tragedy in their history. The Lord marvelled at the man's faith, and also at the extent of unbelief in others (s.w. Mk. 6:6). Given the Lord's tiredness, mental and physical exhaustion, demanding program,

extreme loneliness etc., the fact He had the emotional energy to marvel is an essay in His extreme sensitivity, and how He let neither His spiritual mission nor His external circumstances stop Him from having such sensitivity regarding the spiritual state of others. In this we see a deep challenge to ourselves.

There must have been certain similarities of personality type between the Lord and His mother. Thus in Lk. 2:33 Mary "marvelled", and the same word is used about Jesus in Mt. 8:10 and Mk. 6:6.

Truly I say to you, I have not found anyone in Israel- The Lord was and is actively searching for faith in people. He is the man looking to find a great treasure (Mt. 13:44), seeking to find a pearl of great price (Mt. 13:46), finding a lost sheep or coin (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:4-9), finding weak and rejected workers to work for Him in His work (Mt. 20:6), wanting to find spiritual fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19), finding willing guests for His own wedding (Mt. 22:10)- any who believe in Him. As He meets so many disappointments, imagine His joy at finding *our* faith, incomplete and at times misplaced as it is. Surely in all this work of seeking and finding just a few He was living out His own command to seek, because we will find (Lk. 11:10). He seems to allude to the idea in telling the disciples to fish on the right side of their boat, and they would find (Jn. 21:6). The incident is replete with symbolism- the message surely is that we will find converts for the Lord, if we seek for them as the Lord did. We in our turn are searching to find the Lord (Acts 17:27); and He is seeking to find us. Hence the flash moment when the searching God and His Son meet searching man in conversion to Christ. Ultimately we are 'found' at the Lord's return (Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:7; 2 Pet. 3:14), but we are also 'found' by Him at the point of first faith in this life.

With such great faith- But as demonstrated in the comment on 8:9, this man had profound *understanding*. Faith must have content, it is belief *in* something, and in this sense faith and understanding are connected.

8:11 *And I say to you, that many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven*- Gk. 'to recline'. The reference is to the Messianic banquet, where Gentile Christians will sit with Abraham and the Jewish fathers- because they have become the children of Abraham by faith and baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29). Lk. 12:37 comments that the Lord will have to *make* the faithful sit down at that banquet- so strong will be our abiding sense that 'I am not worthy of this'. We note too the literal, personal nature of our existence in the Kingdom age.

8:12 *But the sons of the kingdom shall be*- The similar passage in Lk. 13:28 identifies this class as "you yourselves", the Jews of the first century in whose streets the Lord had taught (Lk. 13:26). They were therefore still in some sense God's Kingdom, even though the political form of that Kingdom had been overthrown in Zedekiah's time (Ez. 21:25-27). Likewise those who are under the dominion of the King are in a sense His Kingdom right now, even though the Kingdom is not yet restored in its visible, literal, political sense.

Cast out into the outer darkness- The metaphor continues from the idea of reclining at banquet in 8:11. Some would be cast out from that happy, well lit room- into the darkness outside. The idea of entering a banquet and then being cast out of it is repeated in the parable of the man without a wedding garment, who enters the banquet but is then likewise cast out into "outer darkness" (Mt. 22:12,13). That man therefore becomes symbolic of the Jews who trusted in their fleshly descent from Abraham as a guarantee of salvation and eternal fellowship with him. 'Cast into outer darkness' to experience weeping and gnashing of teeth is paralleled in Mt. 13:42 by "Cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". The "furnace of fire" and the "outer darkness" are both therefore figurative. The language speaks of intense aloneness (in the darkness) and searing mental pain. The spectre and possibility of rejection at the last day is brought frequently before us in the Scriptures, especially in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. It is an element, a dimension of life, that we need to bear in mind. On the one hand, the Lord seems eager to save anyone who believes, such is His grace; on the other pole there is this kind of language about condemnation. I submit that this is an intended, irreconcilable paradox which we are left with, purposefully, and for our good. I doubt that the paradox can be resolved, at least not by any intellectual, expositional process.

There shall be the weeping- Either we will mourn now in repentance (Lk. 6:25; the Greek for "mourn" is often in a repentance context), or we will mourn at the judgment (Mt. 8:12 etc.). Having foretold the inevitable coming of judgment day, Yahweh Himself pleads with Israel: "Therefore also *now*... turn ye even to me... with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12).

And the gnashing of teeth- Weeping and gnashing of teeth is emphasized in Matthew (Mt. 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). Luke mentions it once (Lk. 13:28), Mark and John never. It was clearly a dimension to the Lord's teaching which struck Matthew deeply, and he used it often in his teaching of the Gospel, of which 'the Gospel according to Matthew' is a transcript. Gnashing of teeth suggests anger, and Lk. 13:28 says it is triggered by seeing Gentiles in God's Kingdom and Jewish people from the time of Jesus rejected. So it is partly anger with self, but also the raging anger which comes from jealousy. We need to meditate upon the way in

which actual human beings who met Jesus in the flesh are for sure going to reappear at the day of judgment. On their deathbeds or later in life they may've idly reflected 'Ah yes, there was that Jesus guy I met once, the one they killed, and then a cult started based around Him afterwards'. Such people will reappear at judgment day, and their same basic personality will continue. As they were furious at the Lord's claim that Gentiles would be in God's Kingdom, so they will be in a blind rage about it still at judgment day. The only other time the Greek for 'gnashing' is used in the New Testament is in Acts 7:54, where again the Jewish conscience was pricked, leading them to gnash upon Stephen. How they were then in the first century is how they will be at the last day. The gnashing of teeth is clearly connected with the anger which comes from jealousy at others' acceptance. One cannot help think of the very many professing believers who have huge anger at the thought of an open table, or of someone they consider to be 'outside' of their small circle breaking bread at the Lord's table. Those same basic structures and constructs of thinking, that same essential personality, will reappear at judgment day. The awesomeness of having been resurrected and actually meeting Jesus in person will not change our basic personalities. Our spirit, in that sense, is preserved. The time for change of attitudes and transformation of character is now. In the OT, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Lam. 2:16). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves? Ps. 112:10 speaks of the wicked gnashing with their teeth and melting away, suggesting that the slinking away process goes on even in the outer darkness; they wander, but in their aimless wandering they slowly slink yet further away from their Lord- the one who once fain would have carried them on His shoulders, gathered them under His wings. It's a terrible picture. Cain, in typifying all the rejected, felt that his condemnation was something greater than he could bear (Gen. 4:13).

8:13 *And Jesus said to the centurion: Go your way*- The Lord several times uses this word (literally, 'depart') to a person after having healed them or having had a saving encounter with them. He used it to the healed leper in Mt. 8:4, and again in Mt. 9:6 (the paralyzed man); Mk. 5:19 (Legion); Mk. 5:34 (the woman with an issue of blood); Mk. 7:29 (the Syrian woman); Mk. 10:21 (the rich young man); Mk. 10:52 (the blind man); Lk. 17:14 (the lepers); the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:16); the blind man at Siloam (Jn. 9:7); the resurrected Lazarus (Jn. 11:44). This is a significant theme, therefore, in the Lord's dealings with people. It suggests a commission, a sending forth on His work- the same word is found in the commission to "Go into the vineyard" to work (Mt. 20:4,7; 21:28), 'going' to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16) and finally in 'going' to the world to tell them of the Lord's resurrection (Mk. 16:7). We are each

individually sent out from Him to do His work in our own unique way. The way for the great commission is therefore prepared by these many examples of 'sending'. That commission, the sending out, is therefore a totally personal matter- not something to be merely considered by missions committees, or groups of enthusiasts. We are each personally 'sent', bidden depart on our personal way, as a result of our encounter with the Lord.

As you have believed, so it is done for you– The idea could be that the quality, nature and extent of healing was dependent upon the nature of the faith. We ask for forgiveness for our own sins "as" we have forgiven others. There is here a recognition by the Lord that issues like faith and forgiveness are not simply black or white situations. They are processes, and there is clearly a sliding scale of measurement for things such as faith and forgiveness. The point is that according to where we set the slider on our own faith or forgiveness, so there will be a corresponding response from God. God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone (Mk. 9:23). The extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 " as...so"; 9:29 " according to"; 12:22 " inasmuch").

And the servant was healed in that hour- The phrase could mean that the servant was cured within the same hour, or at that very instant. In this case the suggestion would be that the centurion's faith was great and therefore the cure happened totally and instantly. The Greek for 'healed' is also translated 'made whole', so there could be a comment upon the extent (total healing) and immediacy (instant) of the cure- as a result of the man's great level of faith.

8:14 *And when Jesus had entered Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother lying*- As if the Lord noticed the problem and took the initiative to assist, rather than being asked to. Yet Mk. 1:31 states that "they [told] Him about her" and He responded. Surely the overall picture is that He did notice her need. But He waited to be asked before responding- not because He would not otherwise have responded, but because He wanted to pique the intensity of request and entreaty on their part. We sense the same spirit in how He appeared to be asleep on the sinking boat, and how He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus. And His apparent silence in our own lives is surely to provoke our prayerfulness and faith likewise.

Sick with a fever- The Greek literally means 'to be on fire'. This is yet another example of phenomenological language. A high temperature was thought to be a sign that something was on fire within a person; that wrong idea is repeated without correction, just as the language of demons is. The simple point being made, time and again, is that however folk understood disease, the power of the Lord Jesus was so infinitely greater

that whatever was supposed to be causing the illness effectively didn't exist.

8:15 *And he touched her hand and*- One of the colossal 28 references in the Gospels to the Lord touching needy and neglected people, thereby showing His desire to connect with us in our humanity. We noted under 8:14 that the belief was that this woman's high temperature was because of our fire deep within her. By touching her *hand*, an extremity, perhaps the Lord was showing that actually that belief was wrong. But as with the whole issue of belief in demons as a cause of unexplained illness, the Lord dealt with the issue by inference and implication rather than a direct statement that 'this is wrong'. He reserved such a style for the condemnation of spiritual intolerance and other moral issues.

The fever left her- Also the language of the day, because illness was understood as having to go somewhere when it was healed.

And she arose and ministered to him- Her response to her healing was to serve the Lord and His people. This should be the underlying motive why we ask for healing and good health- so that we can serve. And our response to the Lord's touching of us can never be passive- it involves some level of active serving. Perhaps the use of *diakoneo* looks forward to the office and practice of women being deacons, ministers, in the early church. For the church of any age is to be an extension of the men and women who followed the Lord Jesus in Galilee. There was a Rabbinic prohibition of women serving men at table, so this is yet another instance of the Lord and His people being driven by their desire to respond to God's grace to breaking accepted social norms about gender.

8:16 *And when evening had come, they brought to him many possessed with demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all that were sick*- The healing had been done on a Sabbath, and so they only carried their sick to the Lord after sunset. We see here the power of religious tradition and fear of religious leaders and infringement of their traditions. There would have been urgently sick people, who needed healing as soon as possible. The people believed the Lord could heal them; but their fear of infringing Sabbath traditions was even greater. And we see the same in essence today.

8:17 *So that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: He took our infirmities and bore our diseases*- "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" is how Is. 53 described the cross; but these words are quoted in Mt. 8:16,17 about the Lord's healing of people. The miracles therefore were performed in the spirit of the cross- personally identifying with the sick and healing them through that identification.

8:18 *Now when Jesus saw*- An example of how the Lord was so human that He still acquired knowledge by the exercise of His senses. Knowledge was not just beamed into Him.

Great crowds- Why did the Lord dislike the crowds? It may be that He simply found it nervously and spiritually too exhausting for Him to be surrounded by so many wrongly motivated people. If so, what does that mean about our decision making in view of our human limitations? Or it could be that His focus was upon the training of the twelve and He didn't want to be distracted from that. Or perhaps He foresaw that if the crowds remained too long with Him, then they would begin a public revolt to enthrone Him as a King or at least some figurehead in protest against the Roman occupation. Hence His continual emphasis that His kingdom was about internal renewal, not external revolt. There may well have been a simple logistical issue- He could not normally address thousands of people and be heard by them all without speech reinforcement. The feeding miracles seem to have involved the use of a natural amphitheatre which enabled this. But thousands of people just tagging along, pressing closer to see or feel a miracle… often there would have been no chance to actually teach them anything, and most of the crowd would've only heard exaggerated and distorted versions of what was being said and done by Jesus. And there was also the very real practical danger of a stampede and people being trampled to death; Lk. 12:1 speaks of how one such "innumerable multitude… trod one upon another".

About him, he gave commandment to depart to the other side- The Greek *peran* doesn't have to mean this; it can also simply mean to go further or beyond.

8:19 *And there came a scribe and said to him*- Not necessarily a religious one, although probably this is the reference. The same word is also translated "clerk". It was after Jesus had commanded the disciples to sail to the other side of the lake, that this scribe came to Him. By talking to this man, who likely was just asking the Lord trick questions and trying to catch Him out, the Lord delayed their departure; with the result that they nearly lost their lives in the storm that came (Mt. 8:18-23). The disciples must have many times during that storm reflected with bitter annoyance how the Lord has gotten them in to this problem all because He had been wasting time with that Scribe. But the Lord had such a hopefulness and a spirit of passionate concern for the salvation of the individual, however arrogant and conceited they seemed to be, that He would risk danger in order to spend time with such a person. I find this an amazing example, surrounded as we are by a majority of people who appear like that Scribe.

Teacher, I will follow you- A massive 76 times we read in the Gospels of people following Jesus. Following Him *wherever He goes* is the characteristic of the faithful (Rev. 14:4). The following of Jesus around Palestine therefore was presented in the Gospel records (and they are

transcripts of the preaching of the Gospel) as the pattern for all who would later follow Him. His teaching in these verses, as so often, is that following Him is not about being part of a large crowd which broadly identifies with Jesus and hangs around Him, although often not hearing and taking seriously His words (see on 8:18). It is about real self-sacrifice, and a following Him to the cross. In this we see a rebuke of the cultural 'Christianity' which has historically been so much a part of the Western world. It's hard to follow Him; whereas joining the Christian denomination in which they were raised is for many people easier to do than not do. But really following Jesus is not so easy, and it leads to the death of the cross.

Wherever you go- He sensed the Lord was trying to distance Himself from the crowds (see on 8:18) by going on beyond them, or to the other side of the Lake. And this man said he was willing to do that, to be in the inner circle which the Lord visibly had around Him. For when surrounded by the crowds, He addressed Himself to the disciples (Lk. 12:1; and also in giving the Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5:1 cp. 8:1). "Go" here translates the same Greek word as the Lord has just used in 8:18- He commanded the inner circle disciples to "depart", or "go". And this scribe wanted to be in that inner circle and to go with them. The Lord Jesus had a way of gently turning comments and questions back on the person who made them, and of redefining the terms used. The man said that he would follow Him "whithersoever you got", i.e. to whatever end point the road may lead to. The Lord replied that He had nowhere to lay His head. In other words, it's the following of Him that we need to focus on, rather than the hardness of some possible great future sacrifice that may lie ahead. It's the road, and not the destination, that are important (Mt. 8:19-21).

8:20 See on 6:26.
And Jesus said to him: The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head- The only other time the Greek phrase is used in the record that on death, He 'bowed His head' (Jn. 19:30). His later warnings about what it meant to follow Him were to the effect that it meant carrying our cross with Him to the place of crucifixion. Perhaps there is a hint of that here. It may be that that night, the Lord literally had nowhere to sleep. But it was not the case for Him every night. Yet He seems to be purposefully painting a demanding picture in order to make the point- that following Him was not a case of tagging along with the crowd, hearing garbled reports of His words from others and enthusiastically hoping for some personal benefit from being involved with Him. Jesus died because He gave out His Spirit, as an act of the will. He gave His life, it was not taken from Him by murder. The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he

died… the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person to have ever lived. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him. When the Lord spoke of how "the son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20), He was apparently alluding to a common proverb about how humanity generally ["son of man" as generalized humanity] is homeless in the cosmos. In this case, we see how the Lord took every opportunity to attest to the fact that what was true of humanity in general was true of Him. Perhaps this explains His fondness for describing Himself as "son of man", a term which can mean both humanity in general, and also specifically the Messiah predicted in Daniel.

8:21 *And another of the disciples said to him*- The scribe of 8:19 could therefore be classed as a 'disciple'. The term doesn't necessarily refer to the twelve, although there does seem a distinction between the 'multitudes' who followed and from the edge of that crowd heard a few garbled versions of the Lord's words and work (see on 8:18), and 'disciples', those who were willing to be learners from Him as from a rabbi.

Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father- This was perhaps said in response to the Lord's decision to move on beyond the crowds, or "to the other side" (see on 8:18). Like the scribe, this man wanted to be in some kind of inner circle. And he had shown some interest- it would seem that on the morning of his father's funeral, he had come to listen to Jesus. But he wanted the Lord to delay His departure until he had completed burying his father that afternoon. It seems that a third individual also wanted to follow the Lord further in response to the command He gave to the inner circle to "depart"; for Lk. 9:61 records another person wanting the Lord to just wait until he had run home to say goodbye to his family and explain his absence.

8:22 *But Jesus said to him: Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead*- All three people (see Lk. 9:61) wanted to follow Jesus. But the Lord's point is that unless they were going to pay the price until it hurt, then they were not following Him. They were just tagging along the huge crowds. There is a clear link between following Christ and carrying His cross. Mt. 10:38; Mk. 8:34; 10:21 make it apparent: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". But there are other less evident connections. The man following his father's coffin was told to break off and come follow Christ instead (Mt.

8:22)- as if following Him involved following Him unto the place of death. The faithful women who literally followed Him to the cross are described as *also* having followed Him in Galilee (Mk. 15:41), as if their following then and their literal following of Him to Golgotha were all part of the same walk.

8:23 *And when he had boarded a boat, his disciples followed him*- This is quite a compliment, given the definitions the Lord has been giving in :22 about the difficulty of following Him truly. Chapter 8 emphasizes this theme of following Jesus, the Greek literally means to take the same road as (8:1,10,19,22). Verses 21 and 22 emphasize that this was not as easy as merely literally walking around Palestine with Him, externally following- but it involved the loss of all one holds dear in human life. And the road or way taken by the Lord ultimately led to the cross. A huge 76 times this word is used in the Gospels. The following of Jesus in all ways is the essence of Christianity- for the faithful are those who follow the Lamb *wherever* [and that surely is the emphasis] He goes (Rev. 14:4).

8:24 *And without warning, a furious storm*- The word is also translated "earthquake". The waves from the earthquake "covered" or 'hid' [s.w.] the ship. Given the intensity of the situation it seems unlikely the Lord was really "asleep". Here we have a picture of the apparent silence of God. He appeared to be asleep, He remained with eyes closed, lying there as the boat was hidden beneath the waves. But He did this surely to pique the intensity of faith and urgency of appeal in their prayer to Him for salvation. And the apparent silence of the Lord in our lives is ultimately to try to achieve the same effect.

Arose on the sea- Same Greek word occurs in 8:26 "there was / arose a great calm". Just as easily as God can raise up a crisis, He can raise up the resolution to it. The changes of tense in the Gospel records suggest an eye witness telling the story. Take the parallel Mk. 4:37: "And there arises a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the boat, insomuch that the boat was now filling" (RV). But the rest of the account in the surrounding verses is in proper past tenses- e.g. "He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said..." (Mk. 4:39). The impression we have is of the author getting carried away with the memory of the event, and telling it as if it's happening. And this is especially fitting if in fact the Gospels were performed live rather than coldly memorized as prose.

So much so that the boat was covered with the waves; but he slept- The Greek could also stand the translation 'lying down to rest'. But how could He appear to be resting or asleep in such a situation? I suggest He did this to elicit their desire for Him. Likewise He made as if He would walk by them during another storm, and acted as if He would go on further on the walk to Emmaus. It was all in order to elicit their urgent desire for Him. And so it is with His apparent silence to us; that silence or lack of

immediate response is in order to heighten our final sense of His grace and action. We see it in how He delayed going to Lazarus; it is the principle of Is. 30:18: "Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him".

8:25 *And they came to Him*- 'Coming to' can be understood in the sense of worship. His apparent silence led them to an intensity of prayerful approach to Him. See on :24.

And awoke him- Literally, to raise up. 'Asleep' in 8:24 can also mean simply to lay down to rest. It seemed He didn't want to do anything- until they imposed upon Him with all their energy and intensity of focus upon Him and Him alone as their Saviour. And the whole situation was raised up to that end.

Saying, Save us, Lord!- Peter used the same word when he urged the Lord in another storm "save *me*" (Mt. 14:30). We see how the Lord repeated the storm experience in the lives of the disciples, hoping they would learn the lesson of faith and focus upon Him, and repeating them so that they might be learnt. The two incidents are again connected by the rebuke "Ye [plural] of little faith" (8:26) and then to Peter "You [singular] of little faith" (Mt. 14:31).

We perish!- The same Greek words for 'save' and 'perish' also occur together in Mt. 16:25, where the Lord teaches that if we seek to save our lives in this world then we will perish. He could thereby be making a criticism of the disciples' plea to be saved from perishing; His sense would then have been 'You should have an even greater, focused intensity upon your need to be saved spiritually and not to perish eternally'. Again the two words occur together in Mt. 18:11, where the Lord says that He came to save those who are perishing- and again, He has in view spiritual, ultimate salvation. The perishing disciples on the lake, in need of saving, are therefore being set up as a picture of the intensity of desire we should have for forgiveness and salvation. The way essential intention is understood as prayer is perhaps reflected in the way Matthew records that the disciples prayed during the storm on the lake: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" (Mt. 8:25). Mark records that their actual words were "Teacher, do you not care if we perish?" (Mk. 4:38). Perhaps this was read by Matthew's inspiration as prayer. An alternative would be that they firstly said the words recorded by Mark, and then those by Matthew- in which case we could perhaps notice the difference between "Teacher!" and "Lord!", as if the higher they perceived the greatness of the Lord Jesus, the more moved they were to prayer.

Mark records that they actually said: “Carest thou not that we perish?” (Mk. 4:38). His whole life and death were because He *did* so care that they would not perish (Jn. 3:16). It’s so reminiscent of a child’s total, if temporary, misunderstanding and lack of appreciation of the parent’s love and self-sacrifice.

8:26 *And he said to them: Why are you fearful?*- Fear and unbelief are again connected in Rev. 21:8. The unbelief refers ultimately to disbelief in our salvation, fear of condemnation; see on 8:25 'We perish'.

O you of little faith!- See on 8:25 "save us". The question as to *why* they had little faith echoes to us. Why is it that faith is so hard for us? The track record of the Father and Son as rewarding faith is clear and without question. This *why* question drives each individual into personal introspection, reviewing our history, past and present influences upon us, the nature of our personality. *Why* do we not believe very strongly... ? The records of the Lord’s words to the disciples in the sinking ship are significantly different within the Gospel records. Luke’s record has Him upbraiding them: “Where is your faith?”, as if He thought they had none. Matthew and Mark have Him commenting: “O you of *little* faith...”. Putting them together, perhaps He said and implied something like: ‘O you of little faith, you who think you have a little faith, in my view you have no *real* faith. Come on, where is your *real* faith, not the little bit which *you* think you have...?’ (Mt. 8:26 cp. Mk. 4:40). The Greek for “little” faith is also translated ‘almost’; as if the Lord is saying that they almost had faith, but in reality, had nothing. The Lord spoke of how just a little piece of real faith, like a grain of mustard seed, could result in so much (Mk. 11:12,13)- as if He recognized that there was pseudo-faith, and the real thing. *Oligopistos* ("little faith") is used five times by Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20); it never occurs in Mark and only once in Luke. Perhaps Matthew's Gospel record was written to challenge those whose faith was small, and he encourages them that the disciples likewise started with "little faith".

It seems to me that all the Lord's servants are taught by increments, progressively, being given tests as to the degree to which they have grasped what the Lord has sought to teach them previously. And the Lord Jesus used a similar structured approach with the training of the twelve disciples. When the Lord commented “Have you not yet faith?” (Mk. 4:40 RV) it becomes immediately apparent that He was working with the twelve according to some program of spiritual development, and He was frustrated with their lack of response to it and slow progress. He surely has a similar program in place, and makes similar patient efforts, with each one of us. It is apparent to any reader of the Greek text of the Gospels that Jesus almost always left the verb “believe” without an object

(e.g. Mk. 4:40; 5:34,36; 9:23). The question naturally arose: ‘Believe *in what or whom*?’. And seeing the speaker of the words, the answer was there before their eyes.

Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm- The Greek for "rebuked" can mean just this, but it is also translated 'to solemnly charge'. There are times in the Gospels where the sovereign authority of Jesus as Lord simply shines through. He did His work with a minimum of such displays of authority. Yet there are enough of them to make us appreciate how He could so easily have 'come down from the cross'; such incidents of sovereign authority in His ministry simply pave the way for us to appreciate the degree of self-control and wilful sacrifice and suffering which He achieved on the cross. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water – that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God ‘rebuking’ the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we’re effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God’s people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He ‘rebuked’ the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He ‘rebuked’ demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn’t believe there was a Loch Ness–type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of ‘rebuking’ demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to ‘rebuke’ them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17–20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that’s your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working ‘in My name’.

Mark records that the Lord commanded the waves “Peace, be still”. His authoritative "Peace, be still" (Mk. 4:39) was probably primarily addressed to the Angels controlling the natural elements. The reference to Angels 'ministering' to Him after the temptations suggests their inferiority. Thus He could summon twelve legions of Angels at the time of His greatest passion- maybe He remembered this incident and it was a temptation to Him to use this power over Angels at the crucifixion.

All three of the Synoptics use the same phrase for "a great calm" (Mk. 4:39; Lk. 8:24). It would've been a profound experience. The whole experience looks ahead to the calm of God's Kingdom being brought about by intense latter day prayer during a tribulation so intense that

unless it were shortened, the faithful would die. When the Lord calmed the raging sea into a still calmness, He was consciously replicating what happened when Jonah was cast into the sea. He said plainly that He understood Jonah's willing submission to this as a type of His coming death. Therefore He saw the stilled sea as a symbol of the peace His sacrifice would achieve. And yet even during His ministry, He brought that calmness about; for in principle, His sacrifice was ongoing throughout His life. His blood is a symbol both of His cross and of the life He lived.

8:27 *And the men*- An unusual term for the disciples. But it's understandable- they were awed by the power and majesty of the Father and Son, and therefore keenly felt their humanity.

Marvelled, saying- A word so often used about the response of people to miracles. The Lord had marvelled at another's faith in 8:10, and now men marvel at His faith. A very positive mutuality is suggested here between the Lord and His followers.

What manner of man is this- What *sort* of man is this (Gk. *potapos*), they asked themselves. They felt very much their own humanity (hence they are called "the men" at this time), and their awe was because they sensed that Jesus too was a man. Accepting the humanity of the Lord Jesus is relatively easy on one level, as a matter of theology, exposition or logic. But then comes the far harder part- the awe at the fact that One who was like me could actually do so much and be so much. And this can lead to our feeling a kind of gap between Him and us, although we know He shared the same nature, this in a sense means that we feel the spiritual distance between Him and us very keenly. In later spiritual maturity, Peter seems to have reflected upon this gap and realized that it was bridgeable- for he uses a similar word in saying that because of God's grace, "what manner of persons(*potapous*) ought we to be...". Just as Jesus was human and yet different from unbelieving men, so that same element of difference can be seen in us. The whole consideration is an essay in His humanity and representation of us as humans.
"What manner of *man* is this?" was maybe said on perceiving that His actions were in fulfilment of the prophecy that *Yahweh* would still the waves of the sea. And in the context of stilling another storm, He comments: "Fear not, it is I" - not 'it's *me*'. He was surely suggesting they connect Him with the essence of the Yahweh Name, I am that I am. But the connection was only for those who would truly meditate and connect things together. As our Moslem friends have correctly pointed out many times, Jesus Himself never in so many words claimed to be Messiah. When others said this about Him, He replies by describing Himself as the "son of man". Indeed, this was His preferred self-image. He was intensely conscious of His humanity, His solidarity with us, and it was as if He directed us who later have believed to image Him first and foremost as a *man of our nature*. Of course, He was and is so much more than that.

But because we are human, we have to image ourselves around a perfect human- Jesus, the real and full humanity as God intended. Here those who believe Jesus was God Himself place themselves at a distinct disadvantage- our understanding that Jesus did indeed come "in the flesh" ought to be a tremendous inspiration to us to be like Him. The power and compulsion of His life and example are surely diminished by relating to Him as God Himself.

That even the winds and the sea obey him?- The disciples spoke of the wind and sea as if they were conscious entities, able to be obedient to the word of Jesus. The same word is used to describe the marvel of the people that "even the unclean spirits... obey Him" (Mk. 1:27). Just as wind and sea are not actually living entities, so unclean spirits likewise don't actually exist. But the disciples clearly had the idea in their head. Yet the scale of the Lord's power over such entities in fact showed their effective non-existence in practice.

8:28 *And when he had arrived on the other side*- The Gospel records often paint a broad scene and then zoom in upon the person of Jesus. Mark does this by using a plural verb *without an explicit subject* to paint a picture of the disciples or crowd generally; and then follows this by a singular verb or pronoun referring specifically to Jesus. Here are some examples: "They came to the other side... and when He had stepped out of the boat" (Mk. 5:1,2); "when they came from Bethany, he was hungry" (Mk. 8:22); "they went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples..." (Mk. 14:32). The grammatical feature is more evident in Greek than in English. If the writer of Mark had been a cameraman, he'd have taken a broad sweep, and then suddenly hit the zoom to focus right up close upon Jesus Himself. This is what is being done with words, and it reflects the Christ-centeredness of the whole narrative and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospels are transcripts.

In the country of the Gadarenes- The "Girgashites" of Dt. 7:1, some of the original inhabitants of Canaan who had never been cast out of the land as intended by God. These men stopped anyone passing along the way or road. The point may be that those whom Israel should've 'cast out' to secure their inheritance of the Kingdom were finally cast out by Christ. This lays the basis for the language of 'casting out' the demons into the lake.

There met him two possessed with demons- Mark and Luke focus upon just one of them, Legion. Luke says that Peter went to the Lord's tomb after the resurrection, yet several other disciples also went there ("some of our number"). Luke chose to focus upon only Peter; and here too, he chooses to focus upon only one of the two demoniacs.

Coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could go that way- See on 8:34.

For a detailed study on this incident, see my discussion of it in *The Real Devil*. See too commentary on Mark 5 and Luke 8.

8:29 *And they cried out, saying: What have we to do with you, you Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?*- The language of judgment at the last day, "the time" (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). See on :30 *a good way off* and on :31 *cast us out*. Legion believed he was demon possessed. But the Lord didn't correct him regarding this before healing him; indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). Lk. 8:29 says that Legion "was driven of the devil into the wilderness", in the same way as the Lord had been driven into the wilderness *by the spirit* (Mk. 1:12) and yet overcame the 'devil' in whatever form at this time. The man was surely intended to reflect on these more subtle things and see that whatever he had once believed in was immaterial and irrelevant compared to the Spirit power of the Lord. And yet the Lord 'went along' with his request for the demons he thought were within him to be cast into 'the deep', thoroughly rooted as it was in misunderstanding of demons and sinners being thrown into the abyss. This was in keeping with the kind of healing styles people were used to at the time – e.g. Josephus records how Eleazar cast demons out of people and placed a cup of water nearby, which was then [supposedly] tipped over by the demons as they left the sick person [*Antiquities of the Jews* 8.46–48]. It seems to me that the Lord 'went along with' that kind of need for reassurance, and so He made the pigs stampede over the cliff to symbolize to the healed man how his disease had really left him.

A comparison of the records indicates that the voice of the individual man is paralleled with that of the 'demons'- the man was called Legion, because he believed and spoke as if he were inhabited by hundreds of 'demons':

"Torment *me* not" (Mk.5:7) = "Are you come to torment *us*?" (Mt. 8:29).
"*He* [singular] besought him" (Mk. 5:9) = "*the demons* besought him" (Mk. 5:12)
The man's own words explain his self-perception: "*My* name [singular] is Legion: for *we* are many (Mk. 5:9)". This is classic schizophrenic behaviour and language. Thus Lk. 8:30 explains that Legion spoke as he did because [he thought that] many demons had entered into him.

8:30 *Now there was afar off from them a herd of many pigs feeding*- The term is used about those 'far off' from Christ, the unsaved (Lk. 15:20; Acts 2:39; 22:21; Eph. 2:13,17). The men saw themselves as far from Christ, with nothing in common between them and Him (:29). His

response was to say that OK, let's get the condemnation over and done with- and you yourselves shall be saved. This is very much the kind of teaching which John's Gospel records as being specifically on the Lord's lips. See on :31.

8:31 *And the demons begged him, saying: If you cast us out*- The word is used about 'casting out' to condemnation at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28; Jn. 6:37). These men were obsessed with the thought of condemnation at the last day, being 'tormented' at the last day (:28), being 'far off' from Christ and His salvation (see on :30), 'going away' into condemnation (s.w. Mt. 25:46), plunged into the sea of condemnation (see on :32). They correctly perceived that meeting Jesus in this life was in effect a meeting of Him in judgment, for even then, even now, He is the judge of all. The Lord was assuring them that their fear of condemnation was well and truly 'cast out'; His destruction of the pigs was an acted parable of final condemnation at the last day. John's Gospel doesn't record this incident but as so often, he records the essential teaching in spiritual terms. In John's terms, we need have no fear of future condemnation, for we have received it now, and have passed from judgment to life and salvation. These men had a fine understanding of the Lord Jesus. They realized that meeting Him was meeting their judge. And they ask that the pigs bear their condemnation. And the Lord agrees- which meant that once they had as it were received their condemnation, they had passed from death into life.

Suffer us- AV and some manuscripts. They recognized Jesus as not only Son of God but also their Lord, in total control of their final destiny.

Send us away into the herd of pigs- The same word is used about the rejected at the final judgment 'going away' into condemnation (Mt. 25:46).

Why did the pigs run over the cliff, and why did the Lord Jesus agree to the man's request for this?

Because mental illness features intermittent episodes, it's understandable that the Lord sought to comfort those cured that the change He had brought was permanent. Thus the Lord tells the 'spirit' assumed to be tormenting the mentally afflicted child: "I command you, come out of him, *and enter no more* into him" (Mk. 9:25). It's in the same vein that He drove the pigs into the lake as a sign that Legion's cure was permanent. I suggest that it was a kind of visual *aide memoire*, of the kind often used in the Bible to impress a point upon illiterate people. I suggest that's why in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the scapegoat ran off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. As the bobbing animal was watched by thousands of eyes, thousands of minds would've reflected that their sins were being cast out. And the same principle was in the

curing of the schizophrenic Legion- the pigs were made to run into the lake by the Lord Jesus, not because they were actually possessed by demons in reality, but as an *aide memoire* to the cured Legion that his illness, all his perceived personalities, were now no more. Mental illness is typically intermittent. Legion had met Jesus, for he recognized Him afar off, and knew that He was God's Son (Mk. 5:6); indeed, one assumes the man probably had some faith for the miracle to be performed (Mt. 13:58). He comes to meet Jesus "from out of the city" (Lk. 8:27) and yet Mt. 8:28 speaks of him living in the tombs outside the city. He pleads with the Lord not to torment him (Mk. 5:7)- full of memories of how the local folk had tied him up and beaten him to try to exorcise the demons. Probably Legion's greatest fear was that he would relapse into madness again; that the cure which he believed Jesus could offer him might not be permanent. And so the Lord agreed to the man's request that the demons he perceived as within him should be permanently cast out; and the sight of the herd of pigs running over the cliff to permanent death below, with the awful sound this would've made, would have remained an abiding memory for the man. Note how the 'demon possessed' man in Mk. 1:23 sits in the synagogue and then suddenly screams out (Mk. 1:23)- showing he was likewise afflicted by intermittent fits.

Steve Keating pointed out to me that the madness may have been an infection in the brain of the trichina parasite, commonly found infecting the muscles of pigs - and transmissible to humans in undercooked pork. The infected man would likely have been forced by poverty to eat this kind of food, and likely associated his "problem" with it because of the prohibition of pork under the Mosaic Law. This approach is confirmed by medical observations such as the following:

"Neurocysticercosis is the most common parasitic disease in the world which affects the central nervous system… A 25 year old, illiterate married Hindu male… presented with a three month history of gradual change in behaviour in the form of irrelevant talk … On mental status examination, he was well oriented to time, place and person, cooperative, communicative and responded well to questions asked… Delusions of persecution and reference were present… he accepted the illness but attributed the cause to evil spirits… histopathology report of subcutaneous nodule confirmed the diagnosis of cysticercosis cellulosae…. Significant improvement in psychiatric symptoms was also observed following albendazole (an anti-parasitic drug) therapy. Delusions of persecution and delusions of reference were not found on mental status examination. Insight also improved; instead of attributing the illness to evil spirits, the patient accepted having a physical illness." ("Neurocysticercosis Presenting as Schizophrenia: A Case Report", B. Bhatia, S. Mishra, A.S. Srivastava, *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 1994, Vol. 36(4), pp. 187-189).

The desire to see the disease return to the herds of swine probably stemmed from a need to know that his affliction had been cured in a rather permanent sort of way. And the Lord went along with this. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27). God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

8:32 *And he said to them: Go. And they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the hill into the sea and perished in the waters*- Death in the sea was seen as condemnation; the same figure is used of Babylon's final condemnation.

The Legion incident "proves too much" if we are to insist on reading it on a strictly literal level. Do demons drown? Presumably, no. And yet the story as it stands requires us to believe that demons drown- if we are talking about literal 'demons' here. Clearly, Legion was mentally ill. We therefore have to face the hard question: Was that mental illness caused by demons, or, as I am suggesting, is the language of demon possession merely being used to describe mental illness? If indeed mental illness is caused by demons, the observations of T.S. Huxley are about right: "The belief in demons and demoniacal possession is a mere survival of a once universal superstition, its persistence pretty much in the inverse ratio of the general instruction, intelligence, and sound judgment of the population among whom it prevails. Demonology gave rise through the special influence of Christian ecclesiastics, to the most horrible persecutions and judicial murders of thousands upon thousands of innocent men, women, and children... If the story is true, the medieval theory of the invisible world may be and probably is, quite correct; and the witchfinders, from Sprenger to Hopkins and Mather, are much-maligned men… For the question of the existence of demons and of possession by them, though it lies strictly within the province of science, is also of the deepest moral and religious significance. If physical and mental disorders are caused by demons, Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries rightly considered that relics and exorcists were more useful than doctors; the gravest questions arise as to the legal and moral responsibilities of persons inspired by demoniacal impulses; and our whole conception of the universe and of our relations to it becomes totally different from what it would be on the contrary hypothesis" (T. S. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* (New York: Appleton, 1899) p. 225).

8:33 *And they that fed them fled, and went away into the city and told everything, including what had happened to them that had been possessed with demons*- See on :34 *besought*.

8:34 *And all in the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him*- "Begged" is the very same word used about the demons / mentally ill men 'beseeching' Jesus in :31. As the mentally ill men besought Jesus to send away the demons, so the city dwellers besought Jesus to also 'go away'. As the keepers of the pigs "went their way" (:33), so the same word is used of the demons 'going away' into the pigs (:31,32). As the city dwellers 'came out' to meet Jesus, so the mentally ill men 'came out' of the tombs to meet Jesus (8:28) and the demons 'came out' of them (8:32). Perhaps the idea is that those unbelievers were spiritually in the same position as the despised mentally ill men whom they had excluded from their society. And the story ends with the mentally ill saved, and the townspeople asking Jesus to depart from them, which will be the exact position of the rejected at the last day (Mt. 25:41; Lk. 13:27). It is they who are condemned, by their own wish; the mentally ill men asked for the pigs to bear their condemnation, which they felt worthy of- and thus were saved. The parallel record in Mark 5 records three prayers to Jesus: "the devils besought him", and "Jesus gave them leave" (vv. 12,13); the Gadarenes "began to pray him to depart out of their coasts" (v. 17); and He obliged. And yet when the cured, earnestly zealous man "prayed him that he might be with him... Jesus suffered him not" (vv. 18,19). After the fascination, physically and intellectually, had worn off, very few of the crowds continued their interest. The Lord scarcely converted more than 100 people in the course of His ministry. We are familiar, from our own experience of sin and failure, with the pure grace of the Lord Jesus. We see that largeness and generosity of spirit within Him, that manifestation of the God of love, that willingness to concede to our weakness; and therefore we can tend to overlook the fact that the Lord Jesus set uncompromisingly high standards. I would even use the word "demanding" about His attitude.

To depart from their borders- Consider how the believers were assembled praying for Peter's release, and then when he turns up on the doorstep, they tell the servant girl that she's mad to think Peter was there. Or how the Lord Jesus did such wonderful miracles- and people asked him to go away. We too have this element within us. We would rather salvation and forgiveness were 'harder' to attain. The popularity of Catholic and Orthodox rituals is proof enough of this. It always touches me to read in the Gospels how the Lord Jesus cured wide eyed spastic children, crippled, wheezing young women, and sent them (and their loved ones) away with a joy and sparkle this world has never known. But the people asked Him to go away, and eventually did Him to death. A voice came from Heaven, validating Him as the Son of God; those who heard it

involuntarily fell to the ground. But the people didn't really believe, and plotted to kill him (Jn. 12:37). They turned round and bayed for His blood, and nailed Him to death. He cured poor Legion; and the people told the Lord to go away.

Mark records further: "And as he was entering into the boat, he that had been possessed with demons pleaded with him that he might go with him. But Jesus did not permit him. Instead he said to him: Go to your home, to your family, and tell them how great things the Lord has done for you and how he had mercy on you. And he went his way and began to publish in Decapolis the great things Jesus had done for him, and all men marvelled" (Mk. 5:18-20). This preaching in Decapolis rather than to his family could be read as disobedience. The Gospels are transcripts of the twelve disciples' own preaching and obedience to the Lord's commission for them to go into all the world and tell the news of what they had seen and heard of Him. Yet there is a theme in the Gospels, consciously included by the writers and speakers, of men being disobedient to the preaching commission which the Lord gave them. When some were told to say nothing, they went and told many others (Mk. 7:36). And as Acts makes clear, the disciples themselves were disobedient, initially, to the commission to go tell the Gentiles the good news of their salvation. Legion's disobedience is especially instructive for us:

Mk. 5:19	**Mk. 5:20**
Go to thy *house*	He goes to the *ten cities* [Decapolis]
unto thy *friends*	He goes to *strangers*
tell them [Lk. 8:39 "*show* them"- by personal demonstration to individuals]	He "*publishes*"
how great things	how great things
the *Lord [i.e. God]* hath done for thee	*Jesus* had done for him
and how he had mercy on thee.	[ignored]

The record of the commission given him and his obedience to it are clearly intended to be compared. The man went to strange cities, indeed he organized a whole preaching tour of ten cities- rather than going home and telling his immediate friends / family. And how true this is of us. It's so much easier to embark upon a campaign to strangers, to do 'mission work', to 'publish' the Gospel loudly, rather than *tell* and *show* it to our immediate personal contacts. And we notice too how he omits to tell others of the Lord's merciful grace to him personally. Rather does he speak only of the material, the literality of the healing. And he tells others

what Jesus had done for him, rather than take the Lord Jesus' invitation to perceive the bigger picture in all this- that this was the hand of God. One wonders whether the disciples were commenting upon their own sense of inadequacy in their initial personal witness. The Lord told the cured demoniac to go back to his friends (Mk. 5:19) and family (Lk. 8:39) and witness to them. Clearly enough, the man didn't have any friends- for he had a history of violence and lived alone, many having tried unsuccessfully to bind him due to the grievous harm he must have inflicted upon many. Yet the man went out and preached to the whole area (Mk. 5:20). Was this just rank disobedience to what His Saviour Lord had just told him? Perhaps, due to unrestrained enthusiasm. But more likely is that the man now considered the whole world around him to be his family and friends, and therefore he witnessed to them. His care for others in desiring to witness to them flowed quite naturally from his experience of conversion at the Lord's hands.

Mary's praise that "He hath done to me great things" is surely behind her Son's words in Lk. 8:39, where He bids Legion go home" and shew how great things God hath done unto thee". Her eternal influence on her Son is a huge encouragement to all mothers. For the language of the risen Lord in Revelation has discernible links with language she used to Him in His infancy.

CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And he entered into a boat and crossed over*- The Gospels record the Lord entering into a boat around 15 times. The visual image of Him entering the boat remained deeply with the Gospel writers. It's an incidental proof of the veracity of their records as eyewitness accounts. There must've been something about His body language as He climbed over the boat's side which lodged deeply within them. Perhaps because it is awkward for a man to climb over a boat's side, especially for one who had not grown up as a fisherman, messing with boats from childhood. Perhaps that proof of His utter humanity remained with them all, and is artlessly reflected in their later write-up of their time with Him.

And came into his own city- Another essay in the Lord's humanity. The same term is used about Joseph going to be taxed in "his own city" (Lk. 2:3).

9:2 *Behold*- AV and some manuscripts. Another encouragement for us to play 'Bible television' with the record, inviting us to 'Look' at Him, imagining the Lord in a particular situation which is being described.

They brought to Him- The term is also used of bringing a sacrifice to God, but in this case of the lame.

A paralysed man, lying on a bed- The Greek *ballo* suggests they had thrown him onto the bed / stretcher in their haste to bring him to Jesus. "Bed" is Gk. a table or a couch. They had grabbed whatever could serve as a stretcher.

And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralysed man- This is emphasized in all the accounts of this incident. Because of the faith of third parties, the sins of this man were forgiven. James speaks of the same possibility (James 5:15- the same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used there). Here we have a principle which can totally affect the course and hourly practice of our lives. In some cases, the sins of others can be forgiven because of *our* faith. Job understood that when he offered for his sons after their wild parties. Of course there are invisible limits to the principle, but many of those with whom we have to do in church life are surely within those limits. Quite simply, the salvation of others depends to some extent and in some cases- upon our faith and prayers, and effort to get them to Jesus. This imparts huge and eternal significance to our lives, lived and prayed for others. The same Greek words for "sins" and "forgiven" are used again in the enigmatic Jn. 20:23: "Whose soever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them". I suspect this is John's version of the great commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness to others- the idea being that if we bring them to Jesus, then thanks to our efforts for them, they will be forgiven. And if we are slack to do this, then God may not always find another way, and their sins remain

unforgiven. Prayer really does change things. God is willing to do things in the life of a third party (even forgive them) for the sake of the prayers and efforts of others. That man was healed for the sake of the faith of others. The widow woman's son was resurrected because God heard Elijah's faithful prayer (1 Kings 17:22).

Son, be of good courage- The same term is used later in the chapter, when the sick woman is told that because of *her* faith, she can be of good comfort because the Lord will heal her (9:22). Note too that the woman "said within herself" (Mt. 9:21), using the same phrase as used about the scribes talking 'within themselves' (9:3). The parallel in the situations is surely to underline the lesson- that the faith of *others* can be as effective as the faith of an individual in leading to healing and forgiveness.

Your sins are forgiven- The Lord emphasized this first, and then went on to heal him physically. It's common for the sick and their carers to focus almost exclusively upon their need for healing, whereas the most essential human need is for forgiveness. So the Lord stressed the forgiveness first, and the healing secondly. Clearly there was a link in this case between sin and illness. It could be argued that the two things are connected as they both arise from the curse in Eden. But I would suggest that it's likely that in this case, the connection between the man's paralysis and his sin was more direct. We too often shrug at those in such situations and consider that 'it's their fault'. So it may be, but if a man digs a hole and falls into it, he's still in the hole. And we have all done this, and the Gospel was designed for us exactly because we have done that. There is an inevitable connection between this incident and Is. 33:24, where we read of the restored Zion that "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity". The Lord is implying here as elsewhere that the prophecies of the restored Zion were to be fulfilled in the lives of individuals who had come to Him, and not in the literal glorification and exaltation of Jerusalem over the Roman occupiers.

9:3 *Behold*- AV and some MSS. We are invited to imagine the faces of those men, and likewise perceive as Jesus did what they were thinking within.

Certain of the scribes said within themselves: This man blasphemes- Consider the huge emphasis of the New Testament upon 'thinking / talking within oneself', especially within the Gospels. The same Greek phrase is used repeatedly:
- "Think not to say within yourselves" (Mt. 3:9)
- "The scribes said within themselves" (Mt. 9:3)
- "She said within herself" (Mt. 9:21)
- The believer who fails to grow spiritually has no root "within himself" (Mt. 13:21)

- "They reasoned within themselves... Why do you reason within yourselves..." (Mt. 16:7,8)
- "The husbandmen... said within themselves" (Mt. 21:38)
- The disciples "disputed within themselves" (Mk. 9:33)
- Have salt "within yourselves" (Mk. 9:50)
- The Pharisee "spake within himself" (Lk. 7:39)
- The guests "began to say within themselves" (Lk. 7:49)
- The rich fool "thought within himself, saying..." (Lk. 12:17)
- "The steward said within himself" (Lk. 16:3)
- The unjust judge "said within himself" (Lk. 18:4)
- Peter "doubted in himself" (Acts 10:17)
- Jews who heard the Gospel "reasoned within themselves" (Acts 28:29 Gk.)
- Israel "through the lusts of their own hearts... dishonoured their bodies within themselves" (Rom. 1:24)
- "Within yourselves... you have a better and enduring substance" (Heb. 10:34)
- "Partial within yourselves, judges of evil thoughts" (James 2:4).

There are many other Bible verses which likewise speak of the internal state of a person and the significance of our self-talk- these are just examples of one Greek phrase. It is logical therefore to expect that the great adversary or 'satan' to be internal thinking, how we think and speak within ourselves. And properly understood, this is indeed what 'satan' in the Bible sometimes refers to.

The Jews got caught up on the issue of whether Christ's forgiveness of others made Him God or not- just as some folk do today. His response was to refocus them on the fact that He wanted *you* to *know* that He had real power to forgive *their* sins (Lk. 5:24). I spend a lot of time arguing against the trinity and the 'Jesus = God' mentality. But the essence is, do we *know* on a personal level that the Lord Jesus really has the power to forgive *our* sins?

9:4 *And Jesus knowing their thoughts*- Matthew says the same about the Lord in Mt. 12:25. Time and again, the Gospels record how He "perceived" things about people. Admittedly this could have been because He simply had a Holy Spirit gift to enable this. But I prefer to think that His sensitivity, His perception, aided by His extraordinary intellectual ability as the Son of God [for intelligence and perception / sensitivity are related]… these things developed within Him over the years so that He could sense the essential needs and feelings of others to an unsurpassed extent. "Jesus, seeing their thoughts…" (Mt. 9:4 RVmg.) shows how He came to perceive the hearts of others from His observation of them. This was the same Jesus who could be ridiculed into scorn / shame / embarrassment (Mt. 9:24), such was His sensitivity to others. This

incident helps us to understand the ability of the mind / spirit of the Lord Jesus to connect with that of human beings. Mk. 2:8 puts it like this: "Now immediately, when Jesus realized in his spirit that they were contemplating such thoughts, he said to them, "Why are you thinking such things in your hearts?" (NET Bible). The spirit / mind of Jesus was at one with the spirit / mind of those men. Such was His sensitivity. I don't think it was a gift of Holy Spirit knowledge so much as His sensitivity to the minds of men... and yet Rom. 8:16 calls Jesus "The Spirit" as a title, saying that He bears witness with our spirit / mind, in His intercession to the Father. So this incident in the Gospels gives us as it were an insight into how He *now* operates too... He's the same today as yesterday. He's at one with our mind / spirit, and also with the mind / Spirit of the Father. Thus is He such a matchless mediator. The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha commented: "Went not my heart with you, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?" (2 Kings 5:26). Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When he saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). He 'saw' and knew things by the sensitivity of His perception.

Said: Why do you think evil in your hearts?- The Gk. means 'to ponder', to dwell upon- which is how the word is translated in its two other occurrences in the New Testament (Mt. 1:20; Acts 10:19). The human heart is a fountain of evil thoughts, but the sin is to dwell upon them as the Jews were doing. We note again how the root cause of the Jewish plot to murder the Son of God is located as attitudes within their hearts which grew into the final sin of the crucifixion.

What evil did the Lord have in mind? The use of *poneros* here rather than any word carrying the idea of sin would suggest the Lord had a particular evil act in mind; and surely, He could foresee the evil of the crucifixion. He perceived that this was beginning as a jealous thought brooded upon within their minds. The Lord may have had the same idea in mind when He taught that the Jews would bring forth evil things from their evil hearts (Mt. 12:34,35). The 'evil things' may have been an intensive plural for the greatest evil- the crucifixion. A review of the passages listed in the commentary on 9:3 will reveal that He perceived it was the state of their mind which would lead them to kill Him; there is therefore a great appropriacy in the language of 'satan' being used about both the Jewish opposition, and the mind of the flesh.

9:5 *For which is easier to say*- Gk. 'less work'. The Lord meant 'Which is easier *for Me*'. There were plenty of claims to heal people; but to forgive

sins was of a different order altogether. But the Lord is saying that for Him, they are one and the same; and that His healing was performed in this case on the basis of having forgiven the man his sin. Not only could He forgive sin, but in this case He could remove the consequence of it. For the Lord healed the man *so that* they would realize that He had power to forgive sins (:6).

Your sins are forgiven, or, Arise and walk?- The same words used by Peter when he tells the lame man to 'arise and walk' (Acts 3:6). Peter consciously or unconsciously replicated his Lord in doing healing miracles. The very body language and word choice of the Lord were so impressed upon him that they became the pattern for *his* ministry; and the same should be true of us. The paralyzed man of Jn. 5:8 was likewise told to arise, take up his bed and walk- using the same words used here about the paralyzed man. Clearly the Lord Jesus worked with people according to some pattern. And we can discern similar hallmarks of His work as we get to know each other within the body of Christ today, perceiving as we exchange stories and testimonies that the Lord in essence works in similar ways between human lives today.

The disciples observed as Jesus made a lame man *arise*, take up his bed, and follow Him (Lk. 5:25). But in Acts 9:34, we find Peter doing just the same to Aeneas, even taking him by the hand as he had seen Jesus do to Jairus' daughter. What Peter had seen and learnt of the Lord Jesus, he was now called to do. Not for nothing did he tell Aeneas that "Jesus Christ maketh thee whole", thereby recognizing the connection between him and his Lord.

9:6 *But so you may know*- The reason for the healing miracle was to teach that He could forgive sins. This is why I suggest that in this man's case, his paralysis was a direct and publicly known result of his sin. Perhaps he had been alcoholic, or become paralyzed in an accident whilst stealing something. In this case his friends are to be commended for so wanting his healing, because many would have shrugged him off as someone who was suffering justly. The link between his illness and his sin was so clear that to heal him was seen as effectively forgiving him *and* removing the consequence of his sin. David, Moses and others often asked for the consequences of sin to be removed and at times received this. The palsied man was healed by the Lord in order to *teach others* that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Job was a "perfect" man before the afflictions started; and he is presented as a 'perfect' man at the end. The purpose of his trials was not only to develop him, but also in order to teach the friends [and we readers] some lessons. The purpose of our trials too may not only be for our benefit, but for that of others. If we suffer anything, it is so that we might help others (2 Cor. 1:4). He didn't *only* reward the faith of the man's friends; His motive for the miracle was to seek to teach those Scribes. Our tendency surely would

have been to ignore them, to be angry that in the face of grace they could be so legalistic and petty and so far, far from God... and get on and heal the sick man who believed. But the Lord's picture of human salvation was far wider and more inclusive and more hopeful than that.

That the Son of Man- The humanity of Jesus was the very basis upon which He could and can forgive human sin. This is why 9:8 records that the crowds praised God for having given such power *unto men*. He understood Himself as rightful judge of humanity exactly because He was "son of man" (Jn. 5:27)- because every time we sin, He as a man would've chosen differently, He is therefore able to be our judge. And likewise, exactly because He was a "son of man", "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mk. 2:10). If it is indeed true that "'Son of Man' represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism", then we can understand the play on words the Lord was making- for the term 'son of man' can also without doubt just mean 'humanity generally'. Exactly because He was human, and yet perfect, He was so exalted.

Has authority on earth to forgive sins- He had that power during His mortal life, and yet after His resurrection "*all* power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" (Mt. 28:18). His power to save and forgive is therefore even greater. Perhaps the contrast was that He had the power of forgiveness delegated to Him in specific cases during His ministry, but after the resurrection He had power in His own right to forgive, not on the basis of delegated power but power / authority in His own Name; even though that exalted position was of course given Him by God the Father.

He then said to the paralytic- As if He turned from the Jews to the paralyzed man. It could be that the healing was really for the benefit of the hard hearted scribes- the Lord was going to all this trouble to try to persuade them of His authority as God's Son. We would likely have given up with them, but the way the Lord kept on trying with the orthodox Jews of His day is an essay in perseverance in witnessing. And amazingly, it paid off- in that a number of priests and Pharisees were baptized after His resurrection (Acts 6:7; 15:5).

Arise, take up your bed- The same word is used for taking up the cross (Mt. 16:24), and the Greek for "bed" is also translated a table or couch. He was to pick up a piece of wood and go his way. He was given a simple task of obedience immediately after meeting with Jesus, and we can see that pattern repeated in how the Lord works with people today.

And go to your house- The Lord was sensitive to the situation of those He healed or converted. Just as He commanded the resurrected girl to be given something to eat, so He realized the pressure that would be on the healed man- and so He told him to go home immediately and thus avoid the limelight.

9:7 *And he arose and departed to his house*- Emphasizing his exact and studied obedience to the Lord's command to Him in :6.

9:8 *But when the crowds saw it*- A word used about 150 times in the Gospel records. The crowds were a major feature of the Lord's ministry, and they must have been a great trial to Him. We sense Him seeking to avoid them, to stop them gathering, and yet being so compassionate towards them, despite their often superficial grasp of His works and message. It makes an interesting exercise to consider whether on balance the Gospel writers take a positive view of the crowds or not. John seems to be more negative about them, whereas Matthew seems to emphasize their wonder, naivety, weak understanding and fickleness. But all the Gospels seem to present a clear pyramid structure beginning with Jesus, then an inner circle of disciples, then the twelve, then the crowds, and then the unbelieving, aggressive Jewish leadership. There are certainly similarities with Moses on Sinai and in his relationship with Israel, but they cannot be pushed too precisely. The crowd here in Mt. 9:8 is contrasted favourably with the Scribes- the opening "But..." suggests that they marvelled at the Lord's authority, whereas some of the Scribes became bitterly jealous.

They were afraid and glorified God, who had given such authority to men- See on 9:6 *Son of Man*. There may be significance in the plural *men* rather than *a man*. They marvelled that one of them could have such power to forgive and remove the consequences of sin. It is all an essay in the Lord's evident humanity.

9:9- see on 4:16.
And as Jesus left there he saw a man- Towards Matthew, the author of the account. Such close up detail makes sense if this is indeed an eyewitness account. It's almost as if Matthew had a video camera on his desk and captures the Lord walking towards him after healing the paralyzed man.

Called Matthew- Matthew's preaching of the Gospel makes reference to himself as if he had no personal awareness of himself as he recounted his part in the Gospel events. Whilst personal testimony has a role, the Gospel is about Jesus and therefore "we preach not ourselves" but Christ as Lord and Saviour. If the focus is upon us rather than Him, then we are failing dismally. The humility of the Gospel writers when they refer to themselves is highly instructive. There is reason to believe that Matthew was himself a converted Scribe, who had perhaps turned away from it to being a tax collector; the way he has access to various versions of Scripture and quotes them as having been fulfilled in a way reminiscent of the Jewish commentaries (compare Mt. 4:12-17 with Mk. 1:14,15) suggests this. Matthew's other name was Levi (see Mark and Luke's

record), strengthening the possibility he was once a Levitical scribe; for the scribes were drawn from the priests and Levites. The point is that in this case Matthew would be referring to himself when he writes: “Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt. 13:52). Yet he does so in a beautifully oblique and selfless manner. The Scribes have just been mentioned in the previous incident, which apparently took place within sight of Matthew's desk (9:3).

Sitting at the tax office- It's hard to grasp the degree to which tax collectors were despised and distrusted. We may at times think that we need to show our best front personally when preaching the Gospel, to display our credentials, in order to persuade others of our message. Matthew thought otherwise. He was quite open about who he had been when he was called. Human credentials do not ultimately persuade men and women of Christ- a degree in theology, knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, academic status, a stable career, an externally spotless family history. Rather do the Gospels show us that it is those from questionable backgrounds who are chosen by the Lord as His most effective messengers. The content of the message ultimately far outweighs the credibility of the messenger. And the same is seen today in the preaching of the Gospel.

It was whilst he was at work that he was called, just as the other disciples were called exactly whilst they were about their fishing business, and like Matthew, left all and "followed" the Lord. This is when the call of Christ comes to us- in the very midst of secular life, rather than resting at home looking at a screen.

And he said to him: Follow me- The Greek means to share the same road with. And the road or way of Jesus led to Jerusalem, to the death of the cross, and then to life eternal. The word is used about 80 times in the Gospels. The call was to follow Jesus; the crowds followed, the disciples followed, but often the Lord tries to teach them the difference between merely externally following Him on the same public road, and following Him as He intends; which is to carry a cross and follow Him to Golgotha. We who follow Him in our life situations today are in essence continuing the following of Him which began in those early days in Galilee. But we likewise are challenged as to whether our following is mere membership of a denomination, or a personal following of Him.

And he arose and followed him- Exactly as he had just observed the paralyzed man obediently arise and go where the Lord told him (9:6- another example of Matthew highlighting immediate response to the Lord's call). It's as if Matthew saw himself in that paralyzed man. As the man was laying on the 'bed', so Matthew was sitting 'on' the receipt of custom, the elevated chair and desk (*epi*, translated "at", is better

translated in this context "on"). The Lord spoke with "authority" in the eyes of the people- so that a man arose and followed Him. What gave Him this? Surely it was His lifestyle, who He was, the way there was no gap between His words and who He was. The word of the Gospel, the message, was made flesh in Him. There was a perfect congruence between His theory and His practice. The repeated amazement which people expressed at the Lord's teaching may not only refer to the actual content of His material; but more at the way in which He expressed it, the unique way in which word was made flesh in Him. The way the Lord could ask men to follow Him, and they arose and followed is surely testimony to the absolute, direct and unaccountable authority of Jesus. It was surely His very ordinariness which made Him so compelling.

9:10 *And it came to pass, as he sat eating in the house*- Matthew's record is purposefully ambiguous. Whose house? His own house, where He was living? For Capernaum is called "his own city" at that time (9:1). Or the house to which the healed paralytic had returned (9:6)? Or Matthew's house? However, the other Gospels say that the house was Matthews, and the presence of other publicans supports that. We note Matthew's humility in his recounting of the Gospel, that he leaves the identity of the house vague. He had no desire to boast that he had once hosted Jesus within his private home. Humility and self-abnegation must really be the lead characteristics of all tellers of the Gospel.

Many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples- Clearly the associates of Matthew. They came and sat down with Jesus whilst He was eating. And He accepted them. See the digression about the significance of eating together, and the Lord's open table. Lk. 5:30 RVmg. describes how publicans and sinners had Pharisees and Scribes among them as they all sat at the same table gathered around Jesus. There was something in His person and teaching which welded people together.

9:11 *And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples: Why does your Teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?*- To break your bread with someone, to eat together, was a religious act in Palestinian Jewish society. The Lord broke His bread with sinners in order to bring them to repentance; not because He considered they had cleared some kind of bar of moral and doctrinal acceptability. His table was open, radically so, and so should ours be.

9:12 *But when he heard it, he said*- Did He overhear? Or simply perceive, as in 9:4?

They that are sick need a doctor- Literally, a healer. The same word is used of how "by his stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). All who will finally be saved have been healed by Jesus. Therefore "they that be

whole" must be understood as meaning 'those who *think they are* whole'. The Lord's healing work was done by fellowshipping with those who realized their need for healing. He broke His bread with them first; He didn't heal them and then invite only the healed to His exclusive table. This breaking of bread with them was a 'calling to repentance' (9:13). The many records of the Lord's physical healing were all intended to be acted parables of His healing of spiritual sickness

Not they that are healthy- The Greek word is usually translated with the sense of 'being able'. The Lord's work was with them who felt *unable* to be righteous, who felt that circumstance and past history had left them spiritually incapacitated.

Perception of need and spiritual helplessness is the vital prerequisite. The Lord healed "them that had need of healing" (Lk. 9:11), those who perceived their need. The Lord uses the same word in speaking of how He doesn't go find and save those "which need no repentance" (Lk. 15:11); again, an ellipsis must be read in: 'Those who *think they* need no repentance'. And again in Rev. 3:17- the Laodiceans thought that they "had need of nothing". This, therefore, was a major concern of the Lord- that we cease to perceive our need for Him. The attitude that 'I have no need...' is picked up by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:21,24, where he warns against thinking that we have no need of weaker members of the body of Christ. Our need for Christ personally is to be reflected in practice in our need for association with His body, however weak we feel it to be. God supplies all our need in Christ (Phil. 4:19), but that supplying of our need is not solely in the death of Christ for us, but in the body of Christ.

9:13 *Go*- The Lord was telling them to literally get out of the house, and do some Bible study. Of course, the Pharisees spent their time doing this. The Lord's point was that if they really meditated upon the implications of God's love of grace over sacrifice, then they would understand that it is therefore actually necessary to eat with sinners to call them to repentance.

And learn- The Pharisees saw themselves as only teachers, not pupils. The Lord had diagnosed this problem, for He told them as a teacher would tell a pupil: “Go ye and learn what that means...”. He sent them away to do some homework. And there is a warning for speaking brethren here; the repeated experience of teaching can take away from the eternal sense of student-ship which the true believer will ever feel.

What this means- Literally, 'what is'. The same two Greek words have just been on the Lord's lips to the Scribes- "*What is* easier..." (9:5). Capernaum was a small place, and probably the incidents recorded in Matthew 9 featured the same group of opponents.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice- This was some kind of proof text for the Lord, for He says exactly the same words in Mt. 12:7: "If you had known what this means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless". The context of Hos. 6:6 (from where the Lord was quoting) was of God appealing to a deeply apostate Israel through the situation of Hosea and Gomer. He appeals for her to show *chesed*, covenant love ("mercy"), and not just give the external appearances of a marriage relationship (cp. offering sacrifices). Here in the Capernaum incident, the Lord is saying that He fellowships with sinners because God loves the display of grace rather than technical obedience. If God wishes *chesed*, covenant love, from us, then how do we show it? By fellowshipping with sinners and thereby calling them to repentance. The love which God wishes us to show to Him is channelled in practice through calling others to repentance. For that is the greatest display of love for Him. And if that principle is followed, then we will be lead through the practice of such grace to never condemn the guiltless (this is how the Lord uses Hos. 6:6 in Mt. 12:7).

I came not to call- It was the disciples, including Matthew, who had only recently been 'called' (Mt. 4:21). Matthew again is showing that he considered himself a sinner, one of the sick who needed a doctor.

The righteous- Those who *thought they were* righteous.

But sinners to repentance- AV and some MSS. The fellowship of the Lord Jesus was a call towards repentance, not a reward for it. See on 3:11; John baptized people *unto* repentance. The methods of the Lord should be ours, for having spent His ministry doing this, He transferred it to us in bidding us likewise go worldwide and call others to repentance (Lk. 24:47).

9:14 *Then the disciples of John came to him, saying*- Was this also in Capernaum? If so, we note that John's influence had spread as far north as Galilee. In any case, the impression is given of wave after wave of questioning, activity, controversy. It would've all been so mentally draining of the Lord's spirituality and emotions.

Why do we and the Pharisees often fast- The Greek for 'often' can just as well mean 'largely', i.e. they abstained from food for long periods.

But your disciples do not fast?- Implying they didn't even do so at the Day of Atonement, the one Biblical command for fasting? The Lord's disciples were mostly secular men whom He was trying to turn into spiritual people. And this continues to be the thrust of His work with people. The focus of our preaching should likewise be on getting

unspiritual, secular people to believe, rather than focusing on trying to persuade those who already believe in Him to change their understandings of some points. I don't say we shouldn't do this, but far more will be achieved to His glory by bringing unbelievers to faith, rather than correcting misbelievers. Another reason why John's disciples thought the Lord's men didn't fast could have been because they took seriously His command to not appear to others to fast. And John's disciples proclaiming their fasting meant they were overlooking the Lord's clear teaching *not* to do this in the Sermon on the Mount. But in His gracious way, the Lord didn't point out the obvious *faux pas* in their reasoning. He could've said 'John told you to obey Me. I teach not to proclaim your own fasting. Why aren't you obedient to My teaching?'. But instead He reasoned with them on their own ground. And again, we see a pattern for our engagement with others- not to always baldly confront misunderstanding and reduce it to a right / wrong, black and white issue, but to lead the person further by accepting for a moment that their faulty assumptions are true; for they are true to the person who holds them, and the Lord recognized that.

We also see the Lord's gentle grace in teaching His disciples how to fast, acting as if they were not fasting; when actually they never fasted at all until that point. He wanted them to continue showing themselves to be secular men, who really believed in Jesus. This had been exactly His approach until age 30, to manifest God's perfection through the shroud of ordinariness.

9:15 *And Jesus said to them: Can the sons of the bride chamber*- John had likened himself to the Lord's best man at a forthcoming wedding. The Lord phrases his reply to John's disciples in terms they would've understood- a pattern for us to follow in our response to people. Note too that the Lord's answer implied that His wedding was about to happen. He hoped against hope that Israel would respond, and the Messianic banquet would be soon. But in His later parables, He spoke of how even the guests couldn't be bothered to attend it; it was delayed until human response was suitable. But His hopefulness for human response is again a pattern for us, to have a hopeful attitude in our witness.

Mourn while the bridegroom is with them?- The joy of the bridegroom's friends is a sharing of the groom's joy. John's Gospel records this truth in a different way when speaking of how the Lord's joy is to be our joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13); at His return, we will enter into His joy (Mt. 25:21). We note again how the Lord phrased His response to John's disciples in terms they would best relate to- for John had said that his joy was complete, because he was 'the friend of the bridegroom' (Jn. 3:29). The Lord here in Mt. 9:15 is saying that His disciples are also friends of the bridegroom- He is seeking to persuade John's disciples that actually His disciples are the same as they are, notwithstanding differences in spiritual culture, in that

they are related to Jesus in the same way, as friends of the groom. The Lord was always very positive about His followers. He explained their lack of fasting on their joy at the forthcoming Messianic banquet, when in reality their lack of fasting was because they were secular, non-religious people. The Lord wasn't naïve, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (Mt. 17:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognised Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had.

But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be- Not necessarily plural- s.w. "the day" (Mt. 6:34; 10:15), "that day" (Mt. 7:22)

Taken away from them, and then they will fast- The Gk. *apairo* is a form of the Greek *pairo* which has just been used in 9:6 ("*take up* your bed") and which is now used in the next verse about the new cloth 'taking from' the old garment (9:16). What exactly the connection of thought might be is hard to say. But clearly the 'taking of Jesus from' the disciples was to be at the same time as when the new wine and new cloth were available, which would 'take from' the old cloth in destroying it. This time was surely the death of the Lord Jesus, at which the new wine of His blood confirmed the new covenant and thus ended the old. It was then of course that the disciples mourned (s.w. Mk. 16:10 "they *mourned* and wept"); and the same Greek word for 'taken from' occurs in Jn. 19:15 where the Jews cry "Away with Him!"- to the cross; in Jn. 19:31,38 where the body of Jesus is 'taken from' the cross and in Acts 8:33 "His life is *taken from* the earth". Significantly, Col. 2:14 uses the word to describe how on the cross, Christ 'took away' the old covenant. This is the idea of its usage in Mt. 9:16, that the new wine and new garment would 'take from / away' the old. And it was achieved by the 'taking away' of Jesus at the cross. Through the grace of Jesus, He is in love with us; He has called us to be His bride. He sees us in an extremely positive light. He counts us as righteous to a degree that is a real struggle to believe- even during His ministry, "when we were yet sinners", and when the only example He had of His bride were those faltering 12. He tells the Jews that His people will fast and mourn for His absence after His departure, with the intensity that the friends of the bridegroom would have if the groom suddenly collapsed and died at the wedding (this seems to be the picture of Mt. 9:15, seeing "taken away" as an idiom for sudden death). This is surely a positive view of the sorrow of the body of Christ for their Lord's absence. Even if we see in this mini-parable only a description of the disciples' sorrow after

the Lord's death, He is giving a very positive description of the disciples' joy, saying that they didn't fast for joy of being with Him; He describes their joy as the joy of the friends of the groom at the wedding. Yet the Gospels paint the twelve as a struggling, uncertain group of men, eaten up with the petty arguments of this life, unused to the self-control of fasting. Peter, for example, had until very recently been a possibly immoral young fisherman (1 Pet. 4:3). The happiness of the disciples is explained in terms of them being at a wedding. The happiness of the wedding is normally associated with alcohol, and the context of Mt. 9:15 goes on to explain that Christ's new covenant is symbolised by new wine. The difference between John's disciples and Christ's was that Christ's were full of the joy of the new covenant. But there is ample reason to think that they were heavily influenced by Judaist thinking; they didn't go and preach to the Gentile world as Christ commanded, and even Peter was marvellously slow to realize the Jewish food laws had been ended by Christ, despite the Lord's strong implication of this in Mk. 7:19 (not AV). Yet the grace of Jesus saw His men *as if* they had grasped the meaning of the new covenant, *as if* they had the joy of true faith in and understanding of His work; and He spoke of them to the world in these terms. We can take untold comfort from this; for we dare to believe that the Lord does and will confess our name (character) in a like exalted manner to the Father and His Angels.

There seems to be the idea that fasting was somehow part of the Mosaic system that we have now left behind. Yet the Sermon on the Mount clearly implies that the Lord saw fasting as part of the path of discipleship (Mt. 6:16-18). And there are many examples of fasting in the Old Testament that are quite unconnected with obedience to the Law. When the bridegroom is away, then we will fast [by implication, for His return-Mt. 9:15]. Try it, that's all I can say. Just start by going without some meals. Use the time and the natural desire to eat to increase the poignancy of the special requests you are making. Is. 58:4 RV says that fasting makes “your voice to be heard on high”. Yet the essence of fasting is to take us out of our comfort zone. We human beings have a great tendency to form habits in order to create or keep us within the comfort zone. Yet truly creative thinking and action, not to say true obedience to the call of Christ, all occur outside of the comfort zone. Fasting is only one of many ways to go outside of it. Take a different route home from work; describe your faith to yourself in terms and language you wouldn't usually use. Pray at different times, bring before the Lord the most banal things you usually wouldn't dream of talking with Him about.

Time and again, the Lord uses language about the restoration from exile and applies it to Himself. Thus fasting was common amongst Palestinian Jews of His time, and it was involved with mourning the destruction of the temple and Judah's submission to Rome. And yet the Lord pronounced that the days of fasting were over, and His people were to be feasting

because of His work. But He brought no freedom from Rome, and spoke of the principles of the Messianic Kingdom as being non-resistance to evil rather than military resistance to it. He spoke of Yahweh as 'visiting' His people- but not to save them as they expected, but rather to judge them, with Messiah on His behalf at the head of the Roman armies who would come to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. And thus Jesus deeply disappointed people who didn't want to change their self-centred, nationalistic outlook- those who didn't want to see things spiritually rather than naturally, those who refused to accept the extent of Israel's sin.

9:16 *No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth*- The stress may be on "a *piece*". Taking parts of Christ's teachings was the temptation being given in to by John's disciples (9:14 and see note there on *fast not*). The torn old garment had to be thrown away and the new one totally accepted and publicly worn. The Greek for "new" is not the same as in "new wine" in :17. Here the word means not dressed, not worked by a dressmaker. The only other time the related word occurs is in Mk. 9:3 concerning the clothes of Jesus not having been worked by a dressmaker (AV "fuller"). The Lord Jesus presents Himself here as raw, fresh, unworked to suite the appearance of men.

To get a piece out of a new garment, that new garment would be spoiled; and the old one likewise would be rent further (Mt., Mk.). "New" cloth refers to cloth which hasn't yet been washed; on first washing of the new garment, it would shrink, and thus make a tear. The tragic waste envisioned here is like the new wine running away on the ground from the burst old bottles. Likewise the old wine skins would've had to have the old wine poured out from them to have this new wine put into them. Mixing the old life and the new covenant, a bit of the one here and a bit of the other there, results in this tragic wastage all around. The parables make it seem so obvious that this isn't the way to go; but in reality, we find it hard to be so complete in our devotion to the new covenant.

The unrent garment is that of Christ- the same Greek words are used about the fact that His garment was not rent at His death (Jn. 19:24). Division both within ourselves and within the community is caused by partial response to the new covenant; mixing grace with legalism; it is a rending of Christ's garment, cutting out just a part of it and mixing it with the old way. An old garment that is torn can't be mended by anything new- it must be thrown out and a new garment accepted. The Mosaic system is described as an old garment in Heb. 1:11; it "shall perish" uses the same Greek word as in 5:37, where the bottles "perish". The new garment of Christ is unrent. We are each clothed with the white garment of Christ's imputed righteousness (Rev. 19:8; Mt. 22:11); by dividing with each other we are seeking to rend and thereby destroy that covering. "New" translates a different Greek word than that which in the parallel Mt. 9:16 and Mk. 2:21 is translated "new". The word there means something

which has not been carded. "*Agnaphos* is a combination of the negative article *a*, with *knapto*, meaning, "to card". It is sometimes translated undressed, uncombed or, as above, unfinished, and refers to wool or cotton cloth that has not been carded or combed so that the fibres are aligned, giving it both strength and a smoother, more finished appearance". This suggests that the New Covenant is an unfinished work, God's work in us is ongoing and may take apparently unstable turns and changes- e.g. prophecy is often conditional, the intended timing of Christ's return has and may yet still change, dependent upon factors like the freewill repentance of Israel; God may plan one line of possibility for someone or a whole nation, e.g. Nineveh or Israel at the time of Moses- but change His stated intention in response to human prayer and repentance. This open-ended approach simply can't be squared with the "old" set-in-stone approach of the Old Covenant. The same message is taught by the next parable- *new* wineskins are required, because the New Covenant wine is fermenting, they need to be soft and flexible enough to change; if they are old and set, they will burst because of the movement and dynamism of the new wine. The wine of the Lord Jesus is therefore not about tradition, about a set pattern; but is rather a call to constant change and evolution. Yet paradoxically, religious people become set in their ways more than any, and seek stability in those traditions; whereas the activity of the Lord Jesus is the very opposite.

Onto an old garment- The same phrase is used to describe the Mosaic system in Heb. 1:11.

For the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made- AV and some MSS: *That which is put in to fill it*- This translates one Greek word, *pleroma*, which is elsewhere simply translated 'to fulfil' and refers to the fulfilment of the Law in Christ and "the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

Takes from- Gk. to separate, divide. The encounter with Christ means that ultimately there can be no brinkmanship in remaining partly with the old way, be it the Mosaic way or the way of secular modern life, and partly in the Lord's way. There will only be a painful and messy division in the end.

The rent [NEV "tear"]- Gk. *schisma*, used elsewhere about divisions between people, especially the Jews, concerning Christ (e.g. Jn. 7:43; 9:16). We note the contrast with unrent, untorn garment of the Lord Jesus which even in His death was not rent. Acceptance of the way of Christ means that there will come schism with the old; and more positively, seamless unity is only possible between those who have totally given their lives and way of thinking to Him and His way.

Is made worse- The word and its NT usage has a moral sense. The

division is made more evil. In the context, the Lord was addressing John's disciples who had come under the influence of the Pharisees (9:14). He is saying that they must fully commit to Him, or else the schism between them and the Jews and them and Himself will only become worse and more destructive. There could be no middle way between Christ and orthodox Judaism; the early church tried it, as the NT letters demonstrate, but in the end, it came to a sad and bitter end, and the permanent division of the garment. And this is how all schisms go- unless there is a wholehearted acceptance of Jesus and His teachings, the end finally will be a bitter, destructive rending. The pre-existing, initial schism between persons (cp. that between John's disciples and Christ) will only be made worse unless there is a total surrender to the Lord's ways. In all the unhappy church history which most of us have experienced, that is proved true time and again. Likewise there are those who seek to hide their faith in societies and social situations where it is costly to go Christ's way; but ultimately, they have to choose one way or the other. The rent is made worse. A city set on a hill cannot be hid by its nature.

9:17 *Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins*- A clear reference to Christ's blood of the new covenant.

If they do, the skins will burst- Gk. to shatter, divide. The context is of John's disciples uniting with the Pharisees against the disciples of Jesus. He's saying that if His new wine is not totally accepted, if it is mixed with the old, then lives will be destroyed through further schism. The only basis for avoiding schism is a total acceptance by all parties of the blood of the new covenant.

The wine will run out- S.w. "shed" (Lk. 20:20). Especially significant is the reference in Mt. 26:28 to Christ's blood of the *new* covenant being "shed". Failed spiritual life, the life which only partially accepts the new wine of Christ but refuses to change, refusing to be new containers for it, results in the blood of Christ being as it were shed, the blood of Calvary wasted in the dust, and Christ crucified afresh by our apostasy (Heb. 6:6). This is the final tragedy of refusing to change upon receipt of the new wine.

And the wineskins will be ruined- The point is twice emphasized. The bottles are 'broken' or shattered, and they also "perish". The word is used of the final destruction in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 10:28,39; 16:25; Jn. 3:15). The lives of the untransformed recipients of the new wine are shattered ("break") and then finally they are destroyed in final condemnation.

No, they pour new wine into new wineskins- Wine skins were made of goat skin. The goats speak of the rejected, the sinners, in the parable of the sheep and goats. The wine skins may therefore speak of our flesh of

sin. It's no sin to be a human being and have human flesh, but because of the nature of the new wine, we must become wholly new- or we will be destroyed. The new wine fermented powerfully- similar to the Lord describing His Gospel as yeast which works through flour (Lk. 13:21). The new covenant will work powerfully in us if we let it, and our skins, the life structure we have, must be prepared to accept that. Each wineskin expanded slightly differently in response to the fermenting of the new wine poured into it; no two wineskins expanded to an identical shape or form. We too will individually and uniquely respond to the new wine.

And both are preserved- The loss is not only to the untransformed person. There is also a loss and damage to the new wine, the Lord Jesus. He is not undamaged by the loss of any of His people. Their failure is His re-crucifixion, the pouring out again of His blood, but in vain. All this signals the danger of not being totally transformed after having received the Truth. Interestingly, a form of the Greek *suntereo* ["preserved"] is used in Jn. 2:10, where it is noted that the Lord Jesus *kept* [Gk. *tereo*] the best wine. *Tereo* is frequently on the lips of the Lord in John's Gospel (and is widely used by John in his letters), in the context of 'keeping' His word. But this is done by totally surrendering human life to be a vessel totally devoted to the new wine we have received, rather than steel willed, nail-biting, white-knuckled struggle for obedience to specific laws.

Luke's record adds that the Lord concluded by observing that "No man also having drunk old wine immediately desires new: for he says [deep within himself], The old is better" (Lk. 5:39). This appears to be a concession to the weakness of John's disciples, and to our weakness. Having taught that unless we are transformed, we shall shatter and be destroyed / condemned, the Lord accepts the basic conservatism of human nature- that we will not make the change immediately. There was indeed a changeover period between the Lord's death and the destruction of the temple in AD70. And in human lives today, the Lord recognizes that the total change of life will not come immediately- because we are essentially conservative. In seeking to make the total transformation, we ourselves must realize that however progressive, liberal, flexible, open to new ideas we think we are- when it comes to spiritual change, we are terribly conservative. And it is such unbridled conservatism which stops people changing and accepting the new wine. There is the assumption in many Christian groups and minds that conservative = righteous, and change is likely to be for the worst. And yet the Lord is teaching that it is our native conservatism which stops the vital, transforming change which is necessary to avoid the shattering of life and personality now, and final destruction at judgment day. The Lord here recognizes the basic conservatism of human nature; even those who consider themselves "liberal" are often only so in comparison to others, in relative terms- we are all in fact basically conservative. We stick with what we know and don't easily go outside our comfort zone of the old and familiar. We all

find change hard; new wineskins are able to be stretched. He was perhaps, in the context, making some apology for John's disciples, who still couldn't fully allow themselves to be filled with the new covenant wine. The Gospel of Jesus is all about change and being stretched; and He recognizes that we find this so very difficult. People do not immediately / quickly respond to the new wine of the new covenant because, the Lord piercingly observed, they think the old was better (Lk. 5:39). He perceived, with His amazing penetration of the human psyche, that there is a conservatism deep within us all that militates against the immediate response to Him and the new wine of His blood / sacrifice which He so seeks. Yet once we have made this immediate response in a few things, it becomes easier to get into an upward spiral of response to Him. We become truly a new creation in Him, breaking constantly with factor after factor in our past, which has previously defined us as persons. Quite simply, we become new persons, with all the rejection of the 'old' ways which this requires.

The parable of the sower shows how the Lord foresaw that the majority who responded to His word would not hold on; He knew that men would not immediately appreciate the blood of His cross, but would prefer the old wine of the old covenant (Lk. 5:39). He saw that our spiritual growth would be an agonizingly slow business; as slow as a tiny mustard seed growing into a tree, as slow as a man digging a foundation in rock, or a seed growing and bringing forth fruit. Such growth is *very* slow *from a human perspective*. The parable of the wine exactly predicted the attitude of people to Christ's work in taking the Old Covenant out of the way. The Lord is surely saying: 'I know you won't immediately want the blood of my new covenant. I understand your nature, by nature you'll prefer what you are familiar with, the Old Covenant; you won't "straightway" desire the new wine, but (by implication) you will, after a while' (Lk. 5:39). He foresaw how the implication of the blood of His sacrifice wouldn't be accepted by His people first of all. It would be a process, of coming to accept how radical the gift of His blood is. As we weekly take the cup of His covenant, we come to see more and more the excellency of that blood, and its supremacy over all else. Christ recognized that conservatism in human nature which will naturally shy away from the marvellous implications of what He achieved for us. And true enough, whenever we talk about the present aspect of the Kingdom of God, our present blessings of redemption in Christ, the sense in which we have already been saved...there is a desire to shy away from it all. And true enough, the early Christian believers desperately clung on to the Mosaic food laws, circumcision and synagogue attendance as far as they could; the command to witness to the Gentiles was likewise not taken seriously for some time. It must have been painful for the Lord to know this and to see it, recognizing in it a lack of appreciation of His life and final sacrifice, a desire to reconcile with God without totally committing oneself to His work. He saw the possibility of His blood being

wasted if men didn't change from old to new wineskins. The slowness of the changeover in attitudes amongst the early believers must have been a great pain to Him; as if His blood was being poured out again. The implication is that we shed His blood afresh if we won't change, if we allow the conservatism of our natures to have an iron grip upon us we not only destroy ourselves, but waste the blood of the Son of God. This is the danger of the conservatism that is in our natures; it was this which led men to shed the Lord's blood, and it is this same element within us which He foresaw would lead us to crucify Him afresh. How many times has this conservatism been mistaken as true spirituality! How careful we must be, therefore, not to adopt any attitude which glorifies that conservatism and masks it as the hallmark of a stable believer. The sensitivity of Jesus to the value of the human person was the very opposite of this.

9:18 *While He spoke these things to them*- The impression is given that the ruler was begging the Lord for the healing of his daughter, but instead the Lord delayed responding in order to complete the teaching He was giving about the vital need for total transformation if we have received the new wine. He felt His message was that important. We also notice something which we see several times in the Gospel records- the Lord appears to not respond to human need, to even be deaf to it. For a while. The reason for that, both then and now, was surely to pique the intensity and urgency of the requests.

A ruler- Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue (Mk.). Matthew omits his name- perhaps because his Gospel first circulated in areas local to Jairus where the mention of his name could've led to persecution? The Orthodox Jewish opposition claimed that none of the rulers [i.e. rulers of the synagogues] had believed on Jesus (Jn. 7:48), and yet Jn. 12:42 notes that "Among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be cast out of the synagogue". Jairus clearly was one such ruler, and yet he didn't confess Jesus for fear of consequence and disfellowship. Remember that Jairus had come to Jesus whilst He had been teaching John's disciples the need to totally accept His new wine and not compromise with Judaism and the Pharisees who were standing with them. But whilst He was teaching that, Jairus had been clamouring for Jesus to come and heal his daughter (see on *While He spake*). He rather missed the essential spiritual point because he was distracted by his human need. The Lord's sermon on the mount taught that we are a city set on a hill which cannot be hid, and that if we seek to hide our light under a bucket, then we will lose the light altogether. The omission of Jairus' name in Matthew leads me to fear that perhaps Jairus drifted away from faith, although his great faith at this particular moment in time is recorded positively.

Came and knelt before him, saying- Perhaps not in so many words, but in that believing in the Lord's absolute power in action is a form of

worshipping Him. The same formula is used in Mt. 8:2- the leper worshipped Jesus in that he expressed faith in His power to cleanse (also in Mt. 15:25). The Greek *proskuneo* is not used (as some Trinitarians wrongly claim) exclusively of worship of God. It is used in the LXX, classical Greek and in the later New Testament for worship of men- e.g. Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25), men will worship faithful Christians (Rev. 3:9), the beast is worshipped (Rev. 13:4).

My daughter is even now dead- The Greek could carry the idea of 'for now, she is dead' (see the usage in Mt. 3:15; Jn. 13:7; 16:12,31; 1 Cor. 13:12 etc.); in this case, the man believed her death state was only temporary, until the resurrection he believed Jesus would achieve.

But come and lay your hand upon her that she shall live- The man "came" to Jesus, and now Jesus 'comes' to the man; the same Greek word is used twice. The impression is given of a mutuality between the Lord and those who come to Him in faith.

9:19 *And Jesus rose and followed him, as did his disciples*- This verse zooms in close on the body language and physical movement of the characters, as if the author was the cameraman on the scene. Truly we have eye witness accounts in places like this. The image of the Lord Jesus following a man is unusual, as readers are accustomed to the disciples following the Lord, not Him following men. The point perhaps is that He is responsive to human need and prayer in a sense controls Him, according to His will of course. The picture is of the man racing ahead, so eager to get home. This sets the scene for the interruption to the journey, and serves to heighten the sense we get of his frustration with the woman who is taking up the Lord's time, when for him, every second counted so crucially.

9:20 *Behold*- AV. If Matthew is like a cameraman at these scenes, the word "behold" is as it were a zoom in message, bringing us to focus upon an individual.

And a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years- Exactly how old the child was. Clearly the hand of providence had been at work in both these lives according to some defined sense of timing.

Came behind Him- The scene is being developed from 9:19, where the Lord and the disciples are following the rushing man; and now we 'see' the woman coming behind Jesus, as if she in this sense was also one of the disciples who followed behind Him.

And touched the border of his garment- Her example inspired the many others who later sought to do this in Mt. 14:36. It has been suggested that the hem of the garment referred to the blue band which was to be

worn by Jews to remind them of their commitment to obedience to God. In this case she would have been seeking to associate herself with the righteousness of Christ and be healed / saved [the same Greek word is used] thereby. In essence, this is what faith and baptism into Christ is all about. But the simpler reading is that she thought that if she associated herself even with the Lord's periphery, she would thereby be saved / healed. Given Jewish phobia about blood and the fact that any touching her would have been ritually unclean, she surely disguised her condition. And yet she didn't consider that her uncleanness could make the Lord unclean. Her view of His righteousness was correct- it can be shared with us, but our uncleanness cannot negate His purity. She was driven to this insight by her desperation, just as Job's desperation led him to understand doctrinal truths that were beyond his time and place.

The Lord allowed this interruption when the man was so earnest that the Lord would haste to his home. The Lord, and the hand of providence, wanted to teach the man that how long a person has been dead is no barrier to resurrection; his faith needed to be developed further. And it fits in with the apparent silence of the Lord, always to develop the intensity of our desire for Him and our focus upon Him. Jesus focused on the essential whilst still being human enough to be involved in the irrelevancies which cloud the lives of all other men. Just glancing through a few random chapters from the Gospels reveals this tremendous sense of focus which He had, and His refusal to be distracted by self-justification. In all of the following examples I suspect we would have become caught up with justifying ourselves and answering the distractions to the point that our initial aim was paralyzed.

Focus	*Distraction*	*Resumed Focus*
The sick woman touches His clothes, and He turns around to see her. He wants to talk to her.	The disciples tell Him that this is unreasonable, as a huge crowd is pressing on to Him	"He looked round about [again] to see her that had done this thing" (Mk. 5:30-32). He talks to her.
He says that the dead girl is only sleeping; for He wants to raise her.	"They laughed Him to scorn"	"But..." He put them all out of the house and raised her (Mk. 5:40,41).
He was moved with compassion for the crowds, and wants to feed them and teach them more.	The disciples tell Him to send the people away as it was getting late	He tells the disciples to feed them so that they can stay

		and hear more (Mk. 6:35-37)
Again He has compassion on the hunger of the crowd	The disciples mock His plan to feed them	He feeds them (Mk. 8:3-6)
He explains how He must die	Peter rebukes Him	He repeats His message, telling them that they too must follow the way of the cross (Mk. 8:31-34)

9:21 *For she said within herself*- Earlier in this chapter the inner thoughts of the Scribes were discerned by the Lord (9:4); here again we have insight into private thoughts. This emphasis upon thoughts continues that of the Sermon on the Mount; and contributes to the general impression Matthew gives of the importance of thought, what Paul later calls 'spirit'. For to be spiritually minded is indeed the very quintessence of Christianity.

If I only- 'If I can *only*' is the idea; she thought that physical touch was all that was required. She had the same wrong notion as many Orthodox and Catholic believers have today- that some physical item can give healing. The Lord corrected her by telling her that it was *her faith*- not the touch of His garment- that had made her whole (Mt. 9:21,22). As so often, He had focused on what was positive in her, rather than the negative. We know that usually the Lord looked for faith in people before healing them. Yet after this incident there are examples of where those who merely sought to touch His garment were healed (Mk. 6:56; Lk. 6:19). They were probably hopeful that they would have a similar experience to the woman. One could argue they were mere opportunists, as were their relatives who got them near enough to Jesus' clothes. And probably there was a large element of this in them. But the Lord saw through all this to what faith there was, and responded to it. It is perhaps not accidental that Mark records the link between faith and Jesus' decision to heal in the same chapter (Mk. 6:5). When we fear there is interest in our message only for what material benefit there may be for the hearers, we need to remember this. To identify wrong motives doesn't mean that we turn away; we must look deeper, and hope more strongly.

Touch his garment I shall be healed- The Greek *sozo* is that usually used for 'saved'. She had a wider desire for not only healing (for which other Greek words could have been used) but for salvation on a wider level.

9:22 *But Jesus turning and seeing her, said*- Again the emphasis is upon recording the physical movement of the persons involved in the scene, so that we can visually reconstruct it. The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives.

Daughter- Perhaps the Lord was using the term in the Hebraic sense of 'descendant', seeing her as a daughter of Abraham because of her faith in Him.

Be of good courage- The language has clear parallels with the healing of the paralyzed man recorded earlier in 9:2. "Son" there is matched by "daughter" here, and is followed by the same "be of good comfort". This phrase is used by the Lord four times in the Gospels (Mt. 9:2,22; 14:27; Jn. 16:33); like all of us, He had some phrases He liked to use. But after His resurrection, He used the same phrase when He appeared to Paul (Acts 23:11). He is the same today as yesterday (Heb. 13:8), even down to His word choice and style of speaking. The Jesus whom we shall meet at judgment day is the same Jesus who walked around Galilee; and likewise, our essential personality will be continued eternally throughout the Kingdom. Our spirit will be saved (1 Cor. 5:5), just as His was.

Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed at that moment- The emphasis was on the word "faith"; see on 9:21. The *faith* of the sick woman is commended by the Lord- when it was due to her *understanding* of the significance of the *hem* of the Lord's robe that she had touched Him. She had perceived the connection with the High Priest's hem; perhaps too she had added Job's comment about our touching but the hem of God's garment into the equation. And certainly she perceived that the sun of righteousness of Mal. 4 had healing in his hems / wings of his garment.

The Centurion's servant was healed for the sake of *his* faith; Jairus' daughter was healed because of *his* faith (Mk. 5:36). Hence the Lord told them to believe and stop wavering, so that she would be made whole, or "saved" (Lk. 8:50). This comes straight after the Lord's commendation of the woman with "an issue of blood": "Thy faith hath made thee whole [or, saved]" (Lk. 8:48). It's as if the two healings are similar in their result- being made whole, or saved- and both required faith. But the woman's own personal faith which led to her healing is paralleled with the faith of the family of the girl who was resurrected.

Luke adds: “There comes one from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying to him, Your daughter is dead, trouble not the Master” (Lk. 8:49). We naturally ask: *who* was this “one” who came with this message? In the Gospels, it is often the disciples who term Jesus “the Master”. The implication is that it was they who thought that Jesus wouldn’t have the power to raise the dead, perhaps connecting with their own studied lack of faith in His resurrection later. And the Lord goes on to calm them: “Do not fear *but* believe” (Lk. 8:50). This shows the power of fear- it is fear which stops faith, fear is the opposite of faith. If we know the love that casts out fear, then a whole new style of relationships becomes possible. In so many relationships there is a balance of power which is more realistically a balance of fear- a fear of losing, of being made to look small, a fighting back with self-affirmation against the fear of being subsumed by the other. Be it parents and kids, teachers and students, pastor and flock, so often both sides fear the other. Yet if we are truly affirmed in Christ, no longer seeking victory because we have found victory in Him, His victories become ours… then our whole positioning in relationships becomes so different. For example, our fear of rejection becomes less significant if we believe firmly in our acceptance in the eyes of the Lord, the only one whose judgment has ultimate value. If we can say with Paul that for us the judgment of others has very little value, because we only have one judge… then we will no longer worrying about acting in such a way as to impress others. No longer will it be so important to not express our inner thoughts about people or situations for fear of not using the constant ‘nicespeak’ which results in judgment from others unless it’s used. There will be a congruence between what we feel and think within us, and what we actually show. And thus we will avoid the dysfunction which is so apparent in so many, as they forever struggle to control their outward expressions, hiding their real self, with the real self and the external self struggling against each other in a painful dis-ease.

9:23 *When Jesus came into... He saw...He said*- This is the process of usual human experience, perception and response to perception. It's yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity. The Greek phrase for "came into" is used so often in the Synoptics. Just in Matthew 9, Jesus came into His own city (9:1), came into the ruler's house (9:23) and came into a house (9:28). Consider the other usages of the phrase in Matthew alone: He came into Israel (Mt. 2:21), came into Nazareth (2:23), came into Capernaum (4:13), came into Peter's house (8:14), came into the land of the Gergesenes (8:28); came into a synagogue (12:9), came into a house (13:36), came into His own region (13:54), came into the land of Gennesaret (14:34), came into Magdala (15:39), came into Caesarea (16:13, came into Capernaum (17:24), came into the borders of Judea (19:1), came into Bethphage (21:1), came into the temple (21:23), came into Gethsemane (26:36), came into the place called Golgotha (27:33). Mark and Luke record even other cases of His 'coming into' various towns,

areas and situations. It is a huge emphasis. John's Gospel uses the term, but frequently in the more abstract sense of the Lord Jesus 'coming into' the (Jewish) world. The prologue uses the Greek phrase three times alone in describing how Jesus 'came into' the world and into "His own" (Jn. 1:7,9,11). He was the light and prophet that "came into the world" (Jn. 3:19; 6:14). John's references to the Lord Jesus coming "into the world" (Jn. 12:46; 16:28; 18:37) are therefore not to be read as implying that He literally came down out of Heaven into the world; but rather they are John's more abstract equivalent of the Synoptics' direct and repeated statements that the Lord came into the Jewish world of His day, into human situations. His sending of us out "into" the world is therefore inviting us to go forth and enter into our world and its various situations just as He did. We are to replicate His ministry in our world and situations.

The ruler's house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a tumult- Flute players. If these had already been called, the implication is that the girl had been dead for some time. This places a question mark over the ruler's claim that his daughter had only just died (9:18 Gk.). All through these accounts we see the Lord's grace. The man exaggerated, just as the woman thought that merely touching Christ's clothes was all that was needed for a miracle- and yet the Lord graciously worked with all these people and situations to bless them. On the other hand, embalming would've been done quickly, and perhaps the intensity of the tumult and weeping was because she had indeed just died, and the minstrels would have only just arrived. The Lord in this case would've arrived at the very peak of human distress and need. This is why He was 'delayed' on the way, in order for that peak of need to be reached. Mk. 5:38,39 emphasizes the extraordinary agitation.

9:24 *He said: Leave!*- He was not particularly attempting to create some calm before doing the miracle; but rather was He telling the hired mourners and flute players that their services were no longer necessary. Often the Lord acts before a miracle as if He is sure the miracle is going to actually happen. In this He exemplifies faith- believing that we have already received what we asked for, and acting appropriately. We think of Paul being so confident in his release from prison that he asks people to prepare a room for him to stay in (Philemon 22). In this case, the Lord saw the dead as if she was actually alive, although sleeping. This is to be our perspective regarding those whom we believe shall be resurrected.

For the little girl is not dead but sleeps. And they Laughed at him in scorn- This is recorded in all three of the Synoptics (Mk. 5:40; Lk. 8:53). It made a deep impression upon them all. The Greek could suggest (although not necessarily) that there was a process of derision here which left the Lord looking somehow scorned ("to scorn"). Perhaps He blushed, or looked at the ground- for He was after all human. Clearly these people

were just the hired mourners and flute players. There was an element of anger in their derision because clearly money and payment were at issue if they were to just be sent away.

Luke records how Peter, James, John and the parents of the dead girl entered the house where she was *alone*; and then "they" laughed Jesus to scorn when He proclaimed she was merely asleep (Lk. 8:51,53). It's psychologically unlikely that the distraught, desperately hopeful parents would've ridiculed Jesus like this at that time. The reference is surely to the three disciples doing this. This is a profound recognition of the disciples' weakness- there, alone with Jesus and the distraught parents, they mocked Jesus' ability to resurrect the girl. And they have the profound humility to tell the world about that in their record of the Gospel.

9:25 *But when the crowd had been put outside*- The Lord was consciously seeking to reduce the element of hysteria at the miracle He knew He was going to do. He wanted as few as possible to see the dead body actually revive. There was perhaps a similar logic in the way His own resurrection was not done publicly and His risen body was only seen by a relatively few rather than being displayed publicly. This was not His way, nor the Father's way, even during His ministry.

He entered in and took her by the hand, and the little girl arose- The whole scene of putting mourners out of the house, taking her by the hand and raising her up was followed exactly by Peter in raising Tabitha. The Lord's style, language and even body language became the pattern for those who had been with Him, and it must be the same for us. The Gospels are written in such a way, that through the power of inspiration we can as it were be there with the disciples likewise watching Jesus and learning of His Spirit.

Mark adds that the Lord said: "Talitha cumi, which is, My child, I say to you, Get up" (Mk. 5:41). "Get up" there isn't from the '*anastasis*' group of words which are used about the 'rising up' of dead people in resurrection. It's *egeiro*, which more literally means 'to get up'. 'Honey, it's time to get up now' was what the Lord was saying- not 'I command you to resurrect'. He had raised her, given her life, and He knew that. In fact, He'd done it a while beforehand. For He told the mourners: "The girl isn't dead, she's only sleeping" (:24; Mk. 5:39). He raised her even before going into the room- and He knew that. And so when He finally saw her, He took her hand and gently asked her to get up out of bed. His gentleness, His faith, His calmness, His certainty that the Father heard Him- are all wondrous. The way the Lord healed people reflects His sensitivity- He commanded food to be brought for this girl who had been dead and was therefore hungry (Lk. 8:55).

The Lord Jesus, in His ministry, had forbidden the extroverts from publicly preaching about Him, as they naturally wanted to (e.g. Mk. 8:26). To keep silent was an act of the will for them, something against the grain. It is hard to find any other explanation for why He told Jairus not to tell anyone that He had raised his daughter (Lk. 8:56)- for it would have been obvious, surely. For they knew she had died (8:53). By contrast, those who would naturally have preferred to stay quiet were told to go and preach (e.g. Mk. 5:19). Perhaps Paul was in this category. The parallel between the Lord's words and works is brought out in Lk. 9:43,44: "They wondered at all things which Jesus *did*…He said…let these *sayings* sink down into your ears". There are no distinct 'sayings' of Jesus in this context; He wanted them to see that His works were His words. There was perfect congruence between what He said and what He did. Perhaps this was why He told the parents of the girl whom He resurrected "to tell no man what was done" (Lk. 8:56), even though it was so obvious; He wanted His self-evident works to speak for themselves, without the need for human words. For His works were essentially His message.

9:26 *And the fame thereof went into all that land*- Gk. 'the rumour'. This is why the Lord seems to have disliked doing public stunts and miracles in front of many eyes; He didn't want this kind of publicity. Rumours, inevitably exaggerated and distorted, started to spread about Him. He wanted to teach God's word, and the miracles were incidental to that. So easily, they created a false message about Him because of the rumours which were created by them. It was inevitable that such rumours would spread, and yet it is hard to find anywhere in the Gospels where the Lord specifically seeks to correct them. Instead He focused upon being Himself and teaching the message He had come to deliver, and living the life He had to live. This focus needs to be remembered by us in our ministries, for the more earnestly we work for Him the more rumours will be generated and come back to our ears. But the Lord appears to have largely ignored them, and to have allowed His own personal example to be the ultimate answer to all rumours.

The Greek *ge* is used for "land" and the language could hint at a global distribution of the Lord's fame, as if Matthew saw in this a foretaste of the future spreading of the Gospel about Jesus.

9:27 *And as Jesus passed on from there*- It was such a long day for the Lord, wave after wave of need assailing Him. And perhaps He had many such days, this is just one typical day recorded. That He maintained mental perfection despite exposing Himself to such pressure and exhaustion is a window into His love and desire to save humanity. He could easily have reasoned it was better to take it easy locked in a monastery-type existence. But that would've led to sins of omission, and love is simply not like that. The same word is used again in Mt. 20:30, where again two blind men latch onto Him as He 'passes by' or 'departs'.

The picture is of circumstances repeating in the Lord's life, just as they do within ours. Doubtless the later two blind men were inspired by the story of these two blind men. The note that the Lord 'passed by' is again an indication of eye witness accounts, with the Gospel writer as a kind of inspired cameraman focusing closely upon the Lord's movements and presenting us with a gripping picture of Him and His movements, so that we may really feel we too are 'there'.

Two blind men followed him, crying out, and saying: Have mercy on us, son of David!- A phrase emphasized in Matthew more than the other Gospels. Significantly, he records the phrase on the lips of the wise men who came from a Gentile land (Mt. 2:1-12), a Gentile woman (Mt. 15:22), children (Mt. 21:15) and twice on the lips of two blind men (here and in Mt. 20:30). Perhaps the implication is that the Jewish spiritual leadership didn't perceive Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of David- it was the blind, Gentiles, children, women, i.e. the marginalized, who did so.

There is a definite connection between the appeal for mercy and faith the Jesus is "Son of David", both here and elsewhere (Mt. 15:20; 20:30,31). This surely was because of their understanding that God's mercy would not depart from David's son (2 Sam. 7:14; 22:51), the mercy to David was therefore "sure" (Is. 55:3); thus these people understood that if *Jesus* as the "Son of David" enjoyed the mercy / favour of God, therefore He could share that mercy with them. They believed what the Lord made explicit in John 17- that the relationship He enjoyed with His Father could really be shared with all who believed in Him. No wonder that the Lord healed these thoughtful, marginalized people; they really had meditated deeply upon Him. We should also note that in Hebrew thought, being a 'son of' someone meant sharing their characteristics. And David must be the most merciful of all the Old Testament characters; his grace to Saul and the family of Saul, to Absalom and all who rose up against him, are amazing.

9:28 *And when he had arrived into the house*- The men had been crying (Gk. 'shrieking') to Him as He was walking to the house; but He waited until He was in the house before healing them. This is similar to how on the way to cure Jairus' daughter, the Lord appeared not to be so urgently responsive; He stopped to cure the woman with blood issues. Likewise He remained 'asleep' on the boat as the waves almost submerged it. This is not because He doesn't care, is too busy, or has slow responses to human situations. Rather by this method does He seek to heighten *our* sense of desperation, faith and need for Him.

The blind men came to him, and Jesus said to them: Do you believe- It might have seemed obvious that they believed the Lord was able to heal them. But by having to face the question, the issues are focused. And the Lord also perceived a difference between people who simply have desperate need and urgently beg anyone for help- and those who believe

in His ability to resolve the issue. The cry of need is not the same as the cry of faith. The cry of need simply is an animal cry of desperation for help, any help, from anyone. Whereas the cry of faith is focused specifically upon the Father and Son and their unique ability and power. The Lord clearly wanted to ensure these men made that distinction, and He works in our lives likewise. The question "Do you believe...?" sounds rather like a question asked before baptizing someone. It's possible that Matthew was aware of that, and was again seeking to develop a continuity between the people Jesus encountered during His ministry, and we whom He encounters today.

That I am able to do this?- The Lord wanted to know if they accepted His *ability* to do the cure. He was probing the degree to which they would accept that He could therefore choose not to cure them. He therefore spoke in terms of His *ability* to cure.

They say to him: Yes Lord- A poor translation. *Nai* means far more than "yes", it is a solemn affirmation, better rendered 'Truly'. Along with the confession of the Lordship of Jesus, this heightens the impression that we have here some form of early confession of faith, as if these men were being set up as representative of all those who later would likewise profess faith and come from darkness to light. Being blind, these men had never seen Jesus and yet they believed in Him; perhaps there is emphasis in Matthew upon the faith of blind men because these people were in a similar situation to the recipients of his Gospel- believing on having heard but never having actually seen Jesus.

9:29 *Then he touched their eyes, saying*- The eyes of these blind men may well have been secreting ritually unclean body fluid. Actually touching the eyes, when the Lord had all manner of options open to Him, reflects His desire to connect with human weakness and need as directly and intimately as possible. Again, Matthew the cameraman is as it were zooming in close up on the movements of even the Lord's fingers. Around 30 times the Lord is described as touching people to heal them, with the principle "touch not the unclean thing" clearly in view. By doing so, making this conscious allusion to one of the greatest tenets of Judaism and Jewish social interaction, He was redefining 'touching'. He perceived that the ritual requirements not to touch the unclean were not because there was anything unclean in itself on a metaphysical level, but rather to teach against involvement in wickedness. But to save the unclean, we must touch them, be involved with them, enter into their lives, engage with them. And the Lord insistently and repeatedly demonstrated this by touching the unclean. Many conservative Christian believers make the same mistake as the Jews- they consider that the Lord's table must be closed to the unclean. But there is no guilt by association. We are not to "fellowship the unfruitful works of darkness" in the sense of participating in them ourselves, but we are to reach out to and 'touch' the individuals

caught up in those things. The Lord's redefinition of 'touch' needs to be taken seriously by many conservative communities today. And we note how just a few verses earlier, earlier that same day, the unclean woman had 'touched' Jesus. And now He in turn touches others. In ritual terms, He was unclean and was spreading His uncleanness to another. But He was actually spreading His holiness by doing so. He was purposefully subverting the understanding of guilt by association and uncleanness by physical touch.

According to your faith be it done unto you- This might imply that the extent of their restored vision was dependent upon the degree of their faith. In some cases, the Father and Son operate in a sovereign way, as with the blind man of John 9 who was cured without knowing who Jesus was. In others, their action and the extent of it is directly in proportion to human faith.

9:30 *And their eyes were opened*- The Lord's work is to be repeated by us, for we are commissioned as Paul was to open the eyes of those in spiritual darkness (Acts 26:18). We therefore are not to simply view Him and His work in Palestine as history, as interesting background... He there, in all His ways, in life and death, is our real pattern to be copied in our own contexts of life.

And Jesus strictly ordered them, saying: See that no one knows it!- The Greek for "see" means just that, indeed it can mean to stare, to look intently at something. Clearly it's a play on ideas- 'Now you can see, use your seeing to ensure that nobody knows about this'. But surely it would be obvious? How can a healed blind man be hidden? How can it not be known what has happened to him? And this was exactly the point. In line with the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, our witness is essentially in who we are. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. There is no possibility that a lamp burning in the darkness can be unnoticed. And by this command to tell nobody, the Lord was encouraging them to witness in exactly the way He had outlined in the Sermon. Clearly the man wanted to shout out his good news. But by quietly walking around, seeing life as it really is, being his normal self, this would be an even more powerful witness.

9:31 *But they went and spread abroad his fame in all that land*- Disobedience to the Lord's commands about witness is a sad feature of the New Testament record, not least in the initial refusal by the disciples to obey the great commission and take the Gospel to the entire Gentile world.

9:32 *As they were leaving*- S.w. "departed" in :31. This was a very long day for the Lord. Again, Matthew's record focuses upon physical movement of the players in the scene. It was as the cured blind men were going out of the house, intent on disobedience to the Lord's request

not to publicize their cure, with the Lord surely guessing that would be the case, that people brought a dumb man to him for healing. Wave after wave of pressure and human need broke against the Lord; we can only admire His stamina and core principle of love which enabled Him to endure and not turn others away because of His own exhaustion.

A dumb man who was possessed with a demon was brought to him- Gk. they lead to Him. Again, Matthew focuses close up on the person of the Lord and the physical movements involving Him. The statement is not that he was dumb *and* demon possessed. Clearly the idea was that his dumbness was thought to be due to His possession by a demon. The causes of dumbness have now been analysed and explained. It's not caused by demons, and is today usually capable of some degree of cure or improvement. Therapy doesn't partially drive demons away. Clearly, the language of demon possession was used to describe illness and human conditions which could not be otherwise explained in the first century.

9:33 *And when the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke and the crowds marvelled, saying: Such a thing has never been seen in Israel!*- Recorded from the perspective of the onlookers. They couldn't perceive that a dumb person could be healed without something exiting them. I have heard doctors in less developed parts of the world using language such as 'This will get it out of you' when persuading uneducated folks to take medicines. This verse proves too much for those who claim demons actually exist- for it suggests that dumbness is cured by a demon being located and cast out from within the person. Yet dumb people are cured by medical methods that make no reference to demons. The dumb spoke, whilst in the same chapter, on the same day, the lame had been made to walk and the blind been given sight; and the deaf had been given hearing (if Mk. 7:32-37 occurred at the same time). So during this very long day in the Lord's ministry, the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:5-7 had been initially fulfilled. Perhaps the people came seeking such healing because they were convinced that Messiah had come and His Kingdom must be beginning. Despite their misunderstanding the nature of the Kingdom, the Lord seems to have responded positively to their faith, just as He does with misbelievers today.

There were people claiming to cast out demons in Israel at the Lord's time. But as Josephus records, they operated by first asking the sick person for the name of the demon within them and then cursing that demon until it supposedly departed. The need to name demons was therefore very important for the exorcists. The problem with dumb people was that they couldn't speak, most were illiterate and couldn't write, so it was thought to be very hard to cure the dumb because they could never name the demon possessing them to an exorcist. The Lord's healing of

dumb demons (as the people understood it) therefore placed Him in a category of His own far above the exorcists.

9:34 *But the Pharisees said: By the prince of the demons he casts out demons*- We sense that the Pharisees were desperate to minimize the Lord's miracles, but they were driven to admit they were miracles, the demons did actually leave (as they saw it), and all they could say was that the Lord must therefore have been in league with the prince of the demons. This of course was a foolish and desperate argument, because as the Lord later pointed out, their sons also claimed to drive out demons, so that would imply that they were also in league with the prince of the demons. This shows that the miracles of Jesus were beyond doubt, as those by Peter were later. Genuine miracles wrought by the Holy Spirit cannot be denied even by the most cynical- contrasting sharply with many Pentecostal claims of healing and supposed exercise of the Spirit gifts of healing.

9:35 *And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues and*- As in 4:23, the emphasis seems to be upon the Lord trying to get to as many isolated people as possible. The Greek suggests this idea, and is used again in Mt. 23:15 "You *compass* sea and land to make one proselyte". The Lord's emphasis upon the villages rather than the big cities such as Sepphoris was in line with His mission to specifically get to the marginalized and those whom no itinerant preacher ever would bother trying to get to. The "villages" would've been no more than a few houses, requiring hours of walking to, over hilly tracks. Our own missionary work can take an example from this, but for all of us there should be the spirit of wanting to spread the message to the very corners of society.

Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom- Literally, heralding the Gospel of the Kingdom. Not 'Preaching / heralding the Kingdom', but heralding the preaching of that Kingdom. The difference is significant. The Lord saw Himself as doing the groundwork for another evangelizing of the Kingdom- namely that which would be done by us. Significantly we read that Paul simply preached [s.w.] the Kingdom (Acts 28:31). Matthew, like the other evangelists, often hints at the great commission to spread the Gospel with which the Gospels all end (even John, if you look for it!).

And healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness- As if the Lord purposefully tried to engage with every kind of human need and weakness. This means that His unity with humanity, His ability to be a total representative and utterly sympathetic High Priest "in every point" (Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15,16), was not something which was achieved automatically. He consciously worked on it, and His life of engagement with humanity resulted in Him developing into the unique mediator and representative which He is. The language here is repeated in 10:1

concerning the work of the disciples- the Lord's preaching ministry isn't mere history, it is to be replicated in essence in *our* ministry.

Among the people- AV and some MSS. Literally, "in" the people. There is the hint at internal sickness and healing.

9:36 *But when he saw the crowds, he was moved with*- This is part of the general summary of His preaching work which we have in :35. Most men would've inwardly groaned whenever they saw the crowds surging towards them. But not the Lord. Every time He saw a crowd of humanity, He was moved with compassion. We too are faced by human need, crowds of it, if only we will have the sensitivity to perceive it. And instead of groaning and raising eyebrows, we ought to be moved with compassion at their need, at how humanity is rudderless- if we have the spirit of Christ.

Compassion for them- Several times used in the Gospels about the Lord's response to people. In His self-revelation in the parables, the Lord uses the same word about Himself and the Father- He is the Samaritan who "had compassion" on the wounded man (Lk. 10:33), as the Father of the prodigal son likewise had compassion on him (Lk. 15:20). Mk. 6:34 adds at this point that He *therefore*, as a result of that compassion, started to "teach them many things". Then He asked His disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest…" (Mt. 9:36-38). It was their spiritual as well as their material and human need which evoked His compassion. I have to say that this spirit of urgent compassion is not as strong among us as it should be. There seem few if any tears shed for the tragedy of humanity. The world's desperation seems written off as 'they're not interested' rather than felt as a tragedy that should evoke our emotional and practical response. When Jesus saw the leper who wanted to be "clean"- not just 'cured' or eased of his discomfort- He made an emotional response. He put forth His hand, touched him, and made him clean- because He was "moved with compassion" (Mk. 1:40,41). Mt. 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk. 5:19 and Lk. 7:13 all record other times when the sheer humanity of the situation evoked the Lord's compassion: e.g. the woman in the funeral procession of her dear son, or the hungry crowds, unfed for 3 days…

Because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd- Could be rendered "harassed and helpless". The hypocrisy of the Pharisees didn't simply irritate the Lord, He went further to proactively feel sorry for the crowds who were without a shepherd- and He did something about it. Their lack of shepherds is the background for the Lord's command to pray therefore for *workers* to be sent out into the harvest (Mt. 9:37,38). We might think that the crowds being without a shepherd would lead the Lord to urge that good shepherds be sent to them. But instead He chooses another metaphor- seasonal labourers

required to go and reap a harvest. Perhaps this was because He didn't consider the disciples nor indeed anyone in Palestine at the time to really be capable for shepherding. He was the only shepherd- the singular good shepherd. Perhaps the point of the change of metaphor was that the Lord's flock doesn't need mere shepherds, those in the positions of leadership, so much as *workers* first and foremost. The Lord is clearly alluding to the concern of Moses that after he died, the people would not be "as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:17). The hint is that Israel were in effect without Moses- whereas the Jewish religious leadership considered that they were being fiercely faithful to Moses. Perhaps there is also the hint that the Lord realized that He would not always be with these crowds (He had just taught that the bridegroom would be taken away from them in 9:15), and His prayer is that the Father will send out workers to replace Him. For our ministry in this world is effectively that of Jesus reincarnated in us as His body. See on 10:1.

9:37 *Then said he to his disciples: The harvest*- The harvest and reaping is ultimately at the Lord's second coming (Mt. 13:30,39). The prayer here could not simply be for more Gospel workers, but for the Angels who are the reapers in Mt. 13:39 to be sent forth- thus, a prayer for the second coming, motivated by the hopeless situation with the shepherds of God's people. But we can surely interpret the Lord as once again teaching the 'now but not yet' aspect of His Kingdom. Insofar as we go out and reap the harvest, we are doing what the Angels will do at the second coming. Note how He saw the crowds who wanted only loaves and fishes as a great harvest. He saw the potential... Note how the phrase "the harvest is *plenteous*" uses the word usually translated "great" in describing the "great multitudes" that flocked to the Lord (Mt. 4:25; 8:1,16,18; 12:15; 13:2; 14:14; 15:30; 19:2; 20:29). Those crowds were seen by Him as a harvest.

Indeed is plentiful- His preachers were like harvesters working in the very last hour to bring in the harvest- in fact, the harvest was spoiling because it's not being fully gathered. The fault for that lies with the weak efforts of the preacher-workers ("few" both in number and weakness, as the Greek means). This means that the ultimate degree of success of the Father's work with men to some degree depends upon us. There are people who would be gathered if there were more and stronger, better workers (not so "few"), but who will not be. To some extent the Father has delegated His work into our hands. He will not necessarily raise up another way of harvesting those people into His Kingdom if we fail Him. In this lies the power of the fact that *we* are the labourers who do the reaping in our Gospel work now; and yet it is the Angels who do this reaping at the last day (Mt. 13:39). This means surely that there is a direct correlation between whom *we* reap for the Lord now and who shall finally be gathered into His Kingdom by the Angels at the second coming. Our responsibility for others' eternity and the extent of God's glory on this

earth is huge. The Lord Himself here prayed that more labourers would be sent forth into the harvest, but the real answer only came in the sending forth of labourers by the Father in the post-resurrection dispensation (Mt. 20:1). We are all commanded by the great commission at the end of Matthew to go forth and do this work.

But the labourers- The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-8) suggests that all who are called to the Gospel are called to be labourers in the harvest. The call is not to learn a few theological truths and preserve them, nor to slump into a culture of meeting attendance or churchianity. It is to labour in harvesting the great potential which there is in this world.

Are few- The Greek means in both number and strength. The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-8) suggests that many of those who are called for this work only work a few hours, they are standing idle a long time before being called. They are the weak, the lazy, the handicapped, the old, those with a bad work record, whom nobody wanted to hire. Most of the Lord's workers are like that- we shouldn't be surprised to find the Lord's workforce full of those who seem most unsuited to the work of harvesting others. The disciples were the labourers- for a few verses later we read that He sent them forth in His work with the comment that they were labourers who were worthy of their hire (Mt. 10:10). The Lord only had the 12, perhaps, because that was all there was in Israel able to do the job. And He asked them to pray that there would be more sent forth by the Father. This shows the blessing which will go behind the efforts to spread the Gospel to all the world in the last days. There is a fervent, *urgent* desire of the Lord for this, and so His blessing will surely be with all who catch the same spirit of urgency. According to the parable of Lk. 14:23, the quality of converts is sacrificed (by the Lord, not us) for the sake of numbers- which connects with the idea that the coming of Christ is to some degree dependent upon the full number of the Gentiles being converted (Rom. 11:25). Likewise the drag net was brought to land once it was full of fish (Mt. 13:48). The Lord speaks of how "few" (the Greek implies physically weak, cp. the unwanted labourers in the market place) the labourers are (Mt. 9:37), and therefore more (numerically) are needed. Any lamentation about the weakness of the latter day ecclesia must be seen in this context; the Lord is desperate for the places at the supper to be filled, although woe to those who come in without a wedding garment (Mt. 22:12).

9:38 *Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest*- The Lord is praying that the time of the great commission, the sending forth of God's people worldwide to reap the harvest, would be hastened. But it had to wait until after the Lord's resurrection because the disciples were not yet mature enough for it. The Lord *prayed* and urged

others to pray, that the great commission would be given as soon as possible. With what eagerness, therefore, does He watch our fulfilment of it; and with what sadness therefore does He observe our negligence and even denial of it.

CHAPTER 10

10:1 *And he called to him his twelve disciples*- Implying they were not always with Him. But there seems an intended contrast between calling them to Him, and then sending them forth (:5). They were with Him when they were away from Him. It is simply so, that when we witness, the words we speak are in effect the words of Jesus. Our words are His. This is how close we are to Him. And this is why our deportment and manner of life, which is the essential witness, must be in Him. For He is articulated to the world through us. And it explains the paradox of the parallel record in Mk. 3:14, whereby Jesus chose men that they should "be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach". As they went out to witness, they were with Him, just as He is with us in our witness, to the end of the world [both geographically and in time]. And this solves another Marcan paradox, in Mk. 4:10: "When He was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked Him…". Was He alone, or not? Mark speaks as if when the Lord was away from the crowd and with His true followers, He was "alone"- for He counted them as one body with Him. This was why the Lord told Mary, when she so desperately wanted to be personally with Him, to go and preach to His brethren (Jn. 20:18), just as He had told some of those whom He had healed- for going and preaching Him was in effect being with Him.

And gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out- This is in the context of the Lord's concern that the crowds were sheep with no shepherd, which I suggested was an allusion to Moses' words of Num. 27:17 (see on 9:36). Moses asks for God to raise up another to do his work, and God gives him Joshua- and is told "You shall invest him with some of your authority" (Num. 27:20). So the Lord is here treating the disciples as if they are His replacement, going out to do His work, just as the later body of Christ are to do. We have in this preaching tour they are sent on some sort of foretaste of the great commission.

And to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness Every kind of sickness and disease was to be engaged with by them because they were to be the re-incarnation of Jesus' personal ministry, His body to the world. See on 9:35.

10:2 *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these. The first Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother*- Note this is not the record of the choosing of the twelve, but rather of their commissioning and being sent out. The list is broken up into pairs, perhaps because they were sent out as six pairs.

James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother- Mark adds that James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain. See on 16:19.

10:3 *Philip and Bartholomew* Apparently the same as Nathanael, also mentioned with Philip in Jn. 1:46-51.

Thomas and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus- The Gospel records were transcripts by the evangelists of their personal preaching of the Gospel. Matthew adds in the list of the disciples that he was "the publican" (Mt. 10:3). And throughout, there are little hints at his own unworthiness- in his own presentation of the Gospel to others.

10:4 *Simon the Canaanite*- Not 'from Canaan' but a *kananites*, a zealot. We see the wide range of men the Lord called into His band; Matthew the tax collector would've been seen as a traitor, whereas the zealots were at the other end of the political spectrum. The way the 12 didn't break up as a group after living together under extreme psychological conditions is a testament to the unifying power of the person of Jesus. The composition of the Lord's body is the same today, including "all [types of] men". Sadly denominationalism and churchianity has led to churches often being clusters of believers having the same socio-economic, racial and personality type positions, rather than being conglomerations of literally all types of t, of whatever accent and formation.

And Judas Iscariot who betrayed him- "Iscariot" is perhaps 'man of Kerioth.' Kerioth was a small village in Judea (Josh 15:25). Judas would therefore have been the only Judean. It could be that 'Iscariot' is from *sicarius*, 'dagger-man' or 'assassin'. This would suggest that Judas belonged to what was reckoned to be the most far right of the various resistance groups, the Sicarii (the partisans, cp. Acts 21:38). Again we see the wide range of people the Lord was calling together in order to weld them into one body in Him.

10:5 *These twelve Jesus sent out and ordered them, saying*- Literally, apostled them. Whoever is sent forth is apostled, and the great commission sends forth all believers.

Do not go unto the Gentiles and do not enter into any city of the

Samaritans- Given Judaism's strong opposition to Jesus and His teaching, did the Lord foresee they would be tempted to go to the Gentiles? He surely wanted them to replicate His ministry as exactly as possible- and He was sent at that stage to Israel and not to the Gentiles.

10:6 *Instead*- The construction 'Not this but rather that' could mean 'Focus more on that than this', i.e. focus upon the Jews. It was not necessarily a total prohibition on preaching to Gentiles. For similar constructions see Jn. 17:9 and 1 Cor. 1:17.

Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel- It's hard to tell whether the Lord meant that all Israel were lost sheep, or whether He meant that the apostles were to go to the lost sheep within Israel- to the spiritually marginalized whom He too had targeted. For the sense of the commission is that they were to replicate His ministry, as if they were Him to the world around them. He was personally sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 15:24) and He asks them to do just the same. His mission was theirs, and it is ours. As He was sent out by the Father, so He sends us out; we're all in that sense 'apostles', sent out ones. The Lord's parables about *His* searching for the lost sheep until He found it were to be understood by the apostles as now applying to *them*. And we understand from His words here that He considered that lost sheep to be Israel. The search until it was found would then be an appropriate figure for the Lord's never ending search for Israel, a love which He can never give up over the centuries. The allusion is also to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of "the house of Israel" being lost sheep because of their bad shepherds. The Lord doesn't specifically state that the disciples are now the new shepherds of Israel (see note on 9:37,38). He simply sends them to the lost sheep. It seems they were not ready for full pastoral responsibility, but they were to begin their shepherding. We note that the Lord specifically commissions Peter to "feed My sheep / lambs", and these are here defined as the lost sheep of Israel. Hence Peter's ministry specifically to the Jews. These were the sheep who were now lost because of the Jewish religious leadership. The Lord was sending out the apostles to try to provide what the standard religious leadership didn't, even though they weren't mature enough to be designated as 'shepherds' at that stage; and that is how many of us feel or felt when we first perceived we too are being sent out just as much as they were. Notice that the Lord sent the disciples to the lost sheep as sheep (10:16)- not as shepherds. It is the commonality we have with our audience which is the bridge across which we can engage with them and persuade them. To stress what we have in common on a human level is what sets up the possibility for those 'flash' moments when we really get something of the Gospel across to them.

10:7 *And as you go, preach*- The idea could be that they were to 'preach'

whilst travelling, not just as set piece deliveries of speeches about the Gospel, but the good news of the Kingdom should come out of them from who they were, "as" they were going. The same word is in the great commission to us, to 'go and preach' (Mt. 28:19). It was a foretaste of the greater worldwide campaign which was to be the way of life for all in Christ.

Saying: The kingdom of heaven- In the person of Jesus, the essence of the Kingdom came nigh to men (Mt. 10:7; 11:4; 12:28)- and this was why one of His titles is “the Kingdom”. The Kingdom of God is about joy, peace and righteousness more than the physicalities of eating and drinking. In this sense the Kingdom was “among” first century Israel. The Kingdom of God is not merely a carrot held out to us for good behaviour. It is a reality right now, in so far as God truly becomes our king.

Is at hand- Mt. 10:7 and Mk. 6:12 parallel preaching the soon coming of the Kingdom with preaching repentance. The Greek could mean 'Is soon coming', 'Is being brought near' or 'Has come near (already)'. All these meanings were likely intended by the Lord, hence the choice of this wide meaning phrase. The Kingdom was potentially scheduled for establishment 'soon', but Israel's refusal of the Gospel and rejection of the Lord Jesus meant that it was delayed. Mt. 21:34 uses the same phrase to describe how the time of harvest 'drew near'- but the husbandmen refused to give the fruits, and so another program of operation was put into practice. Rom. 13:12, James 5:8 and Heb. 10:25 likewise speak of the day of the second coming drawing nearer by the day. Regardless of whatever delays there may be to the Divine program, we are to live as if "The Lord is at hand" (s.w., Phil. 4:5), as if He is about to come soon. In another sense, by response to the Gospel, the time for the establishment of the Kingdom was being hastened, being 'brought near'. But in a sense, the Kingdom had come near to Israel in that Jesus as King of the Kingdom was the embodiment of Kingdom principles, and He was amongst men at that time. Those who witnessed His Kingdom-like healing miracles had the Kingdom brought near to them (Lk. 10:9). The teaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom was therefore a bringing near of the Kingdom to men. The Lord Jesus, the essence and embodiment of the Kingdom, was there amongst men, and the apostles were heralding ['preaching'] His presence.

10:8 *Heal the sick*- The sayings of Jesus have been translated back into Aramaic, the language of His day, by C.F. Burney. He was struck by the degree to which they had a rhythmic shape, like many of the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament. Thus a passage like Lk. 7:22 has six two-beat lines followed at the end by a three beat line; the commission to the disciples here in Mt. 10:8 rhymes, both in Aramaic and in Greek. The Lord’s prayer is expressed in two-beat lines. The crunch point of the Lord’s forgiveness parable in Lk. 15:7, that there is joy in Heaven over

one sinner that repents, uses the device of alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding words.

The noun for "heal" is found once, in Heb. 3:5, where in the context of describing the Lord Jesus He is called "a servant". The acts of healing were done in a servant-like way. This contrasts sharply with the pride associated with many Pentecostal healers. Whatever good we do others, dramatic or not so dramatic, is to be done as an incarnation of the supreme Servant of all, the Lord Jesus. For it is His ministry which we are performing, not ultimately our own.

Raise the dead- The Greek definitely means 'to awake'. We wonder how many dead people were raised by the apostles, even though the power of resurrection appears to have been granted them here. It's tempting, given the spiritual dimension to the three words chosen here for their work (heal, cleanse, raise), to wonder whether their ministry was intended to be of spiritual service and healing, with physical miracles in second place, although not out of the picture.

Cleanse the lepers, cast out demons- The word also has the sense of moral cleansing. Again the Lord is giving the disciples the work of the priests to do. For it was their job to pronounce lepers cleansed. But He is asking them to do what He Himself had done in Mt. 8:3. His work was to be theirs.

Freely you received, freely give- Gk. 'without a cause'. The allusion is not to anything monetary, but to the free gift of God's grace to us. The only other occurrence of the Greek phrase 'give freely' is in Rev. 21:6, where we read of the free gift of the water of eternal life to whoever really wants it. There is a connection between us 'freely giving' the Gospel now (Mt. 10:8), and being given 'freely given' salvation at the last day (Rom. 8:32; Rev. 21:6). The freeness of God’s gift to us should be reflected in a free spirited giving out of the Gospel to others. Paul’s decision not to take money from Corinth (1 Cor. 9:18) was due to his deep, deep meditation on the principle contained in Mt. 10:8; although there were other passages in the Gospels which he knew implied that it was Christ's will that the missionary should be paid (1 Cor. 9:14 = Mt. 10:10). This issue of payment shows how Paul based his life decisions on his understanding of the principles of the Gospels. He did far more than learn those Gospels parrot-fashion. They were in his heart, and influenced the direction of his life.

10:9 *Acquire no gold, nor silver*- The idea of the Greek is to get or acquire, and the hint could be against taking money for their work with people. But the meaning extends into verse 10, and the sense is clearly that they were not to worry about how materially they were going to do

their preaching tour. They were to trust that what was basically necessary would be provided, just as it was for Israel on their wilderness journey. To just go out and preach with nothing behind them was a huge challenge to their faith in the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, which taught to take no anxious thought for food or clothing (Mt. 6:25). And their obedience and success is likewise a great challenge to our own faith- for so often lack of finance and material things is what leaves many good intentions to preach stillborn. But it is the Lord's will that should spread the Gospel, and as a wise old brother of wide missionary experience told me in my youth "I have never seen a preaching initiative fail for lack of funds".

Nor brass for your purses- Even small coins were not to be considered necessary for the missionary work to finally succeed.

10:10 *No wallet for your journey, neither two coats*- Maybe a reference to a double garment. But the similarity with Israel's wilderness journey is clear. No food pouch for the road, no extra clothes or shoes- because as the Father provided those things for Israel, so He would for those who preach His Kingdom.

Nor shoes, nor staff; for the labourer is worthy of his food- The Lord has used the word about how the labourers are "few", meaning both weak and also few in number (9:37,38), and He will go on to speak of how the labourers He uses to reap the harvest are those who have been standing around unused by others because they are maybe old, weak, lazy or have a poor work record (Mt. 20:1,2,8). Clearly the Lord recognized that His labourers would be weak, but He still expects them to be recognized as "worthy" of support as they attempt to do His work.

The Greek for "food" can mean 'rations', as if they were to be as soldiers on duty. They were to believe that their needs would be met. The mechanism for meeting that need was presumably from the things provided by those who would receive them, although the Lord was clear that they wouldn't always get a positive reception (:14). Their faith in the provision of their needs by their audience was therefore tantamount to faith that some at least would respond positively to their message. Note that by the time Paul wrote 1 Tim. 5:18, this phrase was considered as "Scripture", another hint at an early date for the writing down of the Gospel accounts. The context of that verse is of the financial support of teachers of the Gospel. It seems the Lord expected that those who gave their lives to spreading and teaching His word should be supported in doing so. Note that the context here in Mt. 10 is of itinerant preachers being supported; Paul doesn't quote the Lord's words strictly in context, because he applies them to teachers based in one particular church. But this is how we are to interpret Scripture- taking the principles and applying them to our situation locally, even if that situation may differ in

some ways from the original situation and context in which the principle was first established or stated.

There is a strong theme in the NT that none of the Lord's people are ultimately "worthy", but rather unworthy. There will be faults with all preachers. But by reason of their devotion to the Lord's word and work we are to consider them "worthy" of support- even if aspects of their wider unworthiness are apparent. Support is not only to be given to those who appear faultless, for none are. The word 'worthy' is used later in Matthew 10. Those who respond to the message are "worthy" (:13); there is a mutuality between the teacher and the convert, they both consider each other 'worthy' in that the righteousness and worthiness of the Lord is imputed to them both. Later in the chapter, the Lord teaches that the 'worthy' are those who take up their cross and follow Him, regardless of loss of family and social standing. Their journeys in the preaching of the Gospel were therefore seen by the Lord as a taking up of the cross and following Him (10:37,38). There is nothing therefore glamorous to missionary work, and that point needs to be well understood especially by young people who jet off to exotic places in the name of Gospel extension work.

According to Mark's record of the Lord's words here, He is picking out the picture of Israel as they were on Passover night, as an illustration of how His disciples should be on their preaching mission. "He called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth... and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats". All this is couched in the language of Israel on Passover night. His next words for them appear to be stating the obvious, unless they allude to Israel remaining at whatever place they reached until the fire and cloud moved them on: "In what place soever ye enter... there abide till you depart from that place" (Mk. 6:8-10). It must be remembered that God intended Israel to be a missionary nation, teaching the surrounding world of His ways by their example of obedience to His law. As Israel left Egypt with the gold and jewels of Egypt, so, Jesus implied, the disciples were to carry the precious things of the Gospel.

10:11 *And into whatever city or village you shall enter, search out who in it is worthy*- The contrast is between the worthy and those who don't accept the Gospel (:13,14). So the worthy would be those who have responded to the Gospel already. The Lord's fame had gone throughout Israel (Mt. 4:24) so the apostles weren't going into totally virgin territory. They were following up on the rumours people had already heard about Jesus. "Worthy" seems a strange term to use for the believers, but maybe already the Lord was teaching the idea of imputed righteousness. Those

who had believed in Him were "worthy", and He expected them to likewise consider the preachers of the Gospel to be "worthy" of their support. Belief in Him, therefore, was not without practical demands; it was natural and expected of the Lord that those who had believed in Him should provide materially for His preachers. The first mention of this word for "worthy" in the NT is in Mt. 3:8, where John the Baptist asks his followers to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. Perhaps 'the worthy' had become a technical term for those who had responded to John's teaching about Jesus, or at least openly confessed faith in Jesus. The mission of the apostles here may have been to follow up on them. This would mean that the information in Lk. 7:4 that a man was "worthy" of a healing may have implied that he was one of those who had responded to John the Baptist.

And stay with them until you go- To build relationships, to enhance the possibility of a house church developing there later, and to avoid the temptation to shop around for the best accommodation or the wealthiest sympathizers. Luke adds: “Go not from house to house”. The Lord at least twice stressed to His disciples that they were not to go preaching from house to house, but rather focus upon one house in a village and make that the centre of their work (Lk. 9:4; 10:7). Clearly His intention was that they built up house groups rather than scattered converts. Perhaps this was alluded to by Paul when he criticized sisters who went spreading gossip “from house to house” (1 Tim. 5:13). He surely had house churches in mind.

10:12 *And as you enter into the household, greet it*- The Lord empowered the traditional *Shalom* greeting with real meaning when uttered by the apostles on entering a house. The household were offered real peace with God- all they had to do was say yes to it. If they did not, then the opportunity was withdrawn (:13).

10:13 *If the household be worthy*- Worthy of Christ (same word in :37,38). None are worthy (Rev. 5:4) except Christ (Rev. 5:9), yet if we are in Him, we are counted worthy. The Greek word is used about those who responded to John the Baptist producing fruit 'worthy of repentance' (Mt. 3:8; Lk. 3:8). It could be that the Lord is using the word in a technical sense, referring to those who had responded to John's preaching.

The apostles would have gone to the household because they had heard that it was worthy, or believing in Jesus (see on :11). But the Lord was well aware that there would be those who had a name as believers in Him who actually were not. Even though the household was "worthy" in the sense of having professed faith in Him, they needed to confirm that by

accepting the *shalom* offered in Christ's Name. Note that the household was judged as worthy or unworthy. Here we see the beginnings of the house church movement which was so characteristic of early Christianity. We note too the household baptisms mentioned in the NT. One purpose, therefore, of the apostles visiting these households was to find out who had a name as a Christian believer, and to ascertain whether they were indeed believers. The test was whether the household who claimed to be Christian would receive them, the representatives of Jesus, who were as His body to the world. If the household publicly professed faith in Jesus, having heard something about Him or maybe learnt from John the Baptist, but refused to accept Christ's brethren and the word of Christ as they taught it- then they were classified as not actually believing at all. This has uncanny parallels with our own day, where many claim publicly to be "worthy", to be believers in Jesus personally- but refuse and reject His brethren and are not seriously interested in His words. Herein lies the danger of 'out of church Christianity'. Whatever that means, if it means in reality that we profess a personal allegiance to Jesus but have no time for His people- then it is wrong and a path to rejection by Him. Vague connection with the idea of Jesus and advertising it publicly is not enough of itself- if we reject His brethren, then we have rejected Him. This is a sobering challenge to those whose closed table policies lead them to reject many of His brethren and representatives. There has to be a connection with the use of the same word “worthy” in 10:12- the labourer in the Gospel’s work is “worthy” of being supported. The connection could simply be that the worthiness of the household is proven by whether they consider Christ’s servants likewise ‘worthy’, and whether they treat them accordingly.

Let your peace come upon it, but if it be unworthy, let your peace return to you- See on 10:12. If the household didn't accept Christ's brethren, then the peace of salvation which He had invested the apostles' greeting with, would be withdrawn. His *shalom*, His peace and fellowship with those who name His Name, is dependent upon whether or not they accept His brethren.

10:14 *And whoever*- Whichever town, according to :15.

Shall not receive you, nor hear your words, as you go out of that household, or that city- To receive an apostle personally was to receive his words. As the Lord was the word made flesh, so there should be a continuity, an identity and congruity between the words we preach and us as persons. This means that the receiving of the preachers as persons was connected with receiving their words.

Shake off the dust of your feet- The disciples were to shake off the dust of their feet against unbelieving Israel (Mt. 10:14; Mk. 6:11; Acts 8:51), in

allusion to the Rabbinic teaching that the dust of Gentile lands caused defilement. Israel who rejected the Gospel were thus to be treated as Gentiles. Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Thus Joel describes the locust invasion of Israel in the language of locusts covering the face of Egypt (Joel 2:2,20 = Ex. 10:14,15,19). Israel's hardness of heart is explicitly likened to that of Pharaoh (1 Sam. 6:6); as the Egyptians were drowned, so would Israel be (Am. 9:5-8). As Pharaoh's heart was plagued (Ex. 9:14), so was Israel's (1 Kings 8:38); as Egypt was a reed, so were Israel (1 Kings 14:15). As Pharaoh-hophra was given into the hand of his enemies, so would Israel be (Jer. 44:30). Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation by being finally "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32).

10:15 *Truly I say to you, it shall be more tolerable*- There will be degrees of punishment for the rejected at the last day.

For the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city- The people from Sodom will appear at the day of judgment. Seeing that knowledge brings responsibility, it follows that somehow those people had had God's word preached to them, just as the towns of first century Israel had. But by whom? There is no direct record of Abraham or Lot witnessing to them, but it could be that Lot's righteous living was counted as a witness to them which demanded they too accepted Lot's righteous lifestyle. Seeing that Melchizedek lived in the area, one wonders whether he may have witnessed to them. In any case, we read only a few incidents from the lives of Bible characters; perhaps Abraham and / or Lot made a major witness to those cities and to the area around them ("*the land* of Sodom…").

10:16- see on 24:14.
I am sending you out- When He uses the metaphor of sending out His sheep in Jn. 10, the Lord makes the point that He leads them forth, going ahead of them. And yet with the sending out of the apostles, He didn't literally go with them nor go a day's journey ahead of them. He went before them in the same way as He goes before us, His sheep of this age- in personal example. As He had gone around Israel preaching, so they were to replicate His ministry. And He is a most unusual shepherd, in that He sends them forth knowing that they are walking right into the wolves. "I send you forth" is actually a quotation from the LXX of Ex. 3:12, where Moses is sent forth to take Israel out of Egypt. Thus the Lord bids His men

see themselves as Moses, taking Israel out of Egypt, which becomes a symbol for orthodox Judaism. This subversion of popular Jewish understandings continues throughout this section.

As sheep- Bridge building involves us becoming 'as' our target audience- as Paul was a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles. Thus the Lord tells the disciples to go forth and preach as sheep / lambs; in order to appeal to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt. 10:6). They were to be as sheep to win the sheep.

In the midst of wolves- The language suggests they would be totally outnumbered. They were making a brave witness in the teeth of aggressive opposition. Jewish teaching was that Israel was the sheep which was surrounded by 70 wolves, seen as the Gentile nations (*Pesiqta Rabbati* 9:2*; Tanhuma Toldos* 5). The Lord is subverting this idea- the apostate, legalistic, Torah-observant Pharisees were in fact Gentiles in the Lord's eyes, and the true Israel was comprised of the secular, spiritually immature followers of Jesus.

Therefore be wise as serpents- The Lord may not be using the snake here as a symbol of sin or sinful people. He may simply be alluding to the way that when a snake moves into a new area, it is cautious, uses camouflage to blend in, spies out opportunities, doesn't act hastily and doesn't immediately go for what looks the easiest target. These kinds of characteristics were absolutely necessary for the apostles to emulate in their work. The Lord was not a fan of mass rallies and high profile publicity, rather did He prefer to work as quietly as possible and as deeply as possible with individuals; and He wanted His preachers to do the same. Yet again, as with "in the midst of wolves", the Lord is alluding to an understanding then common within Judaism; in this case, to *Shiyr hashirim Rabba*, fol. 16: "The holy blessed God said to the Israelites, Ye shall be toward me as upright as the doves; but, toward the Gentiles, as cunning as serpents". The Lord is saying that the Jewish religious leadership, with all their hatred of Gentiles, were to be treated as Gentiles- for this is who they were. And again, the true Israel are the Lord's bungling, hesitant, misunderstanding followers and preachers.

And harmless as doves- Doves and snakes are not aggressive and move away from conflict- whereas wolves are aggressive. Perhaps that is the Lord's point- be wise, prudent, but not aggressive, and retreat from confrontation.

10:17 *But beware of men*- As in 10:16, this is an appeal to not be like sheep in their naivety. The apostles were going to suffer, ultimately.

Therefore, they should beware of trusting men too quickly, because the aggression towards them was going to be far greater than they imagined. The apostles likely didn't think that the Jewish religious leadership were as bad as the Lord knew them to be, and they were initially too concerned not to upset them (Mt. 15:12). The "men" of whom they were to "beware" were surely the Pharisees, because elsewhere the Lord teaches the disciples to "beware" of them (Mt. 7:15; 16:6,11,12; Lk. 20:46); and He goes on in this verse to speak of "*their* synagogues", showing that "men" are in fact the Jewish religious leadership.

For they will deliver you up to councils- Their Sanhedrin. The language of 'handing over', Sanhedrin and scourging is all relevant to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. He is teaching here that the preaching of His Gospel is an incarnation of Himself, and will result in our suffering the essence of His own sufferings and death. To go out on the road of missionary witness is to walk the path of the cross. It's not anything glamorous- if done properly as He intended.

And in their synagogues they will scourge you- Scourging was usually only practiced for blasphemy or breaching public order. Maybe we are to read this in the context of the Lord asking His preachers to be as snakes and doves, to not be provocative and not seek to create public showdowns with the Jewish leadership. Perhaps the Lord foresaw that some of His men would fail in this, and suffer accordingly. Or perhaps He foresaw how belief in Him as God's Son would be classified as the ultimate blasphemy. And yet synagogues could only scourge those who were members. The Lord foresaw that His preachers would remain within the synagogue system rather than leave it totally. The fact Paul was scourged in synagogues (2 Cor. 11:25) shows that in being a Jew to the Jews, he opted to remain within the synagogue system. This fact shows that the Lord Jesus didn't intend His people to formally break with the synagogue system, even though it was apostate in doctrine and practice. This indicates that there was absolutely no sense within Him of 'guilt by association' nor a demand for His people to leave apostate systems- they were to remain there until they were cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2) (See references to the Jewish laws in W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) Vol. 2 p. 183).

10:18 *Yes and before governors and kings you shall be brought for my sake, for a testimony*- The Lord wanted to give even kings and rulers the chance of repentance. The legal language suggests that a court case was going on- in the court of Heaven, situations on earth are tried, and the witness of the apostles at their earthly court cases against *them* was used in the court case *against the rulers* which was going on in Heaven.

To them- Or, "against them". The "men" of :17, the Jews; for there is a

contrast made between “them” and “the Gentiles”. In :14 the Lord has taught to shake off the dust of their feet as a “witness against” the unbelieving Jews (this is added in the parallel records in Mk. 6:11 and Lk. 9:5).

And to the Gentiles- Yet the commission told the apostles to *not* go to the Gentiles. The Lord speaks in this wider sense because He wanted them to realize that what He was asking them to do on their brief preaching tour was to be understood by them, even then, as programmatic and prophetic of their (and our) later witness to the entire world, as required by the great commission. The implication is that the “men” of :17 are the ones who will lead to the disciples being persecuted by Gentiles; and this indeed is how it worked out, due to a program of Jewish orchestrated opposition to the Gospel’s spreading. The idea of a testimony to or against the Gentiles is to be found in Mt. 24:14, where we find the same two Greek words used in speaking of the preaching of the Gospel as a *testimony* to “the nations” (s.w. “Gentiles”) in the very last days. The spreading of the Gospel to the whole world will likely be facilitated by high profile, well publicized legal cases against the Gospel’s preachers- something perhaps we have yet to see in the last days.

10:19 *But when they deliver you up*- The Jews (the “men” of :17, the “them” of :18) delivering Christian preachers to Gentile powers, after the pattern of what they did to Jesus.

Do not be anxious how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given to you at that time what to speak- A major theme of the Sermon on the Mount is not to be anxious; the same word occurs in Mt. 6:25,27,28,31,34. Here the Lord is surely saying that the general principles He had taught there would not have specific fulfilment in time of persecution. Likewise “for My sake” in 10:18 alludes to Mt. 5:11.

"Given you" is language appropriate to Moses and prophets like Jeremiah; it is here applied to the Lord's generally secular followers (Ex. 4:10-12; Jer. 1:6-10). He was continually encouraging them to see that ministries which they had never considered possible of realistic emulation were in fact to be their pattern. Time and again, the Lord is saying that His experience under persecution will be ours. For it was *given* Him what to *speak* (Jn. 3:34; 12:49 same words) and He wants us to know that if we preach Him and seek to replicate His ministry in our own, then God likewise will strengthen us as He did His own Son. We note that it was likewise *given* to the apostles what to *speak* in Acts 2:4; 4:29. They misunderstood the great commission- they twisted it to mean that they must preach to all Jews rather than to all the Gentiles; but by grace, God

still kept this aspect of the promise to support obedience to the commission given; even if it was misunderstood.

10:20 For *it is not you that speaks, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you*- Mark has "the Holy Spirit", but the reference to God as Father paves the way for the next teaching- that human family will likely forsake us if we are faithful to our true Father (:21). Even although "we do not know how to pray for as we ought, the Spirit himself intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Spirit of the Father and Son speaks in us when we pray (Rom. 8:15), if our will / spirit is theirs. To put this in more technical but I think very telling terms: "The subject-object scheme of 'talking to somebody' is transcended; He who speaks through us is he who is spoken to" (Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. 3 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. 192). It's perhaps the thought behind Mt. 10:20: "It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you". This is why Paul can thank God that he finds himself praying constantly for Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3)- because he recognizes that not only can we influence God by our prayers, bur He influences us in what we pray for.

We read "in you", not, as we might expect, 'through you'. It may be that the Lord is hinting that if we have the Spirit of God within us, if we are thinking in a spiritual way generally in life, then in times of crisis that Spirit which is in us will guide us to say the right things when under pressure. This approach would explain the present tense here, when the context is speaking of the future (:19). He doesn't say 'It will not be you who will speak, but the Spirit which will speak in you'. The present tense is used here in :20 to suggest that if we are *now* spiritually minded, with our spirit being God's Spirit, then in that future time of crisis we will know how to speak, the words will come out right, because we have lived now in a spiritually minded way. The idea of the Spirit of God speaking in a person, so that their words are not theirs but God's, was language which Jews would've associated with the Old Testament prophets. Again we see the Lord inviting His secular, immature followers to see themselves as the prophets, those whom they had been taught were in a class of their own, and to whom they as mere secular men could in no way pretend. But the Lord's followers were to be a new Moses, new prophets, a new priesthood, a new Israel.

10:21 *And brother shall deliver up brother to death and the father his child, and children shall rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death*- "Deliver up" is a term used about the Lord's delivering to death, just as 'to cause to be put to death' is used of His death (Mt. 26:59; 27:1; Mk. 14:55; 1 Pet. 3:18). Our sufferings in the final tribulation, and for preaching the Gospel generally, grant us a fellowship with our Lord's sufferings. Given the close knit nature of Middle Eastern families, the

language of family breakup used here would've been far harder for the initial hearers to accept than it is for many of us. The family was seen as sacrosanct, somehow your family would always be there for you. But the Lord is teaching that the dislike of Him and His message would be such that it would unleash a social and psychological force of hatred such as had not been known previously. Judaism taught that it was only Gentile families which were like this- only Gentiles betrayed their brother, their parents and their children. But the Lord is teaching that through Israel's rejection of Him and His people, Israel were acting like Gentiles and thus becoming as them in God's sight.

10:22 *And you shall be hated of all men*- This again was Judaism's understanding of Israel's experience in the Gentile world (the word is used of Gentile 'hate' for Israel in Lk. 1:71); but the Lord is teaching that His followers were the true Israel, and the Jewish orthodoxy who hated them were in fact the unsaved Gentile world.

For My Name's sake- It is the Jews who would do this (Jn. 15:21) and yet by doing so, they would simply be doing what "all nations" would do the Lord's people 'for His Name's sake' (Mt. 24:9).

But he that endures to the end, the same shall be saved- It is only by having *hupomone* that we can be saved (Mt. 24:13 cp. Lk. 21:19). And yet Mt. 10:22 would suggest that it will be difficult to have *hupomone* in our last days; many will fall away. Our present world is ever changing; stability in work, residence, relationships etc. seems impossible. *People give up so easily.* The generation brought up on telly and Snickers bars and deregulated Capitalism seeks only immediate resolution and satisfaction; and their short-termism fuels yet further their endless quest for the new and novel. And yet *we* must endure to the end in our work for the Lord and our relationship with Him, believing the same One Faith, living the same spiritual life which those doctrines demand. He amongst us who has *hupomone* to the end of the last generation, right up to the day when the Lord comes, the same will be saved (Mt. 24:13). The Lord Jesus had *hupomone*, it lead Him to the cross and beyond; and we must share His spirit of *hupomone* if we would ultimately share in His salvation (2 Thess. 3:5; Rev. 1:9; 3:10).

The "end" in view may well be the Lord's second coming, when "the Son of Man comes" (:23), in the context of the latter day preaching of the Gospel during the tribulation; for this passage in Matthew 10 is repeated in the Olivet prophecy in this same context. But not all readers of these words will have lived at that time. James so often comments upon Matthew's Gospel, and James 5:11 is the only other place in the NT where the words for 'enduring' and 'end' occur: "We count them happy which

endure [an allusion to the 'blessedness' of the Beatitudes as recorded in Matthew]. You have heard of the patience [endurance] of Job, and have seen the *end* of the Lord". The "end" may therefore refer to the end of the period of trial in some aspect which the Lord brings into the life of a believer.

10:23 *But when they persecute you*- Persecution was and is a matter of 'when' rather than 'if'. The parable of the sower likewise assumes that persecution because of the word will definitely come. "Persecute" is yet another word which figures frequently in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:10,11,12,44) as an event bound to happen to those who follow the Lord. So often, believers stumble because their experience of it catches them off guard. But we are to expect it, and a life lived under Sermon on the Mount principles will prepare us for the moments of crisis when persecution comes to us in direct and ugly forms.

In this city- Which city? The fulfilment of this prediction was surely in the persecution of the Christians which began in Jerusalem; but Jesus was not then talking in Jerusalem. But "this city" could be translated "that city", and the city every Jew had in mind was Jerusalem.

Flee into the next- Fleeing persecution was a characteristic of the persecuted prophets and righteous. Hebrews 11 is full of allusion to the language in which Judaism's heroes were spoken about in the first century, and Heb. 11:34 speaks of how the Old Testament heroes of faith *fled* the edge of the sword (s.w.). Again and again, the Lord is seeking to inspire His secular followers that they are not to glance at those men as icons of a faith far beyond they themselves, but to realize their significance, and to be as them in the history of the new Israel that was now being created.

For truly I say to you, you shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes- The construction could mean that *when* they had gone over the cities of Israel, then the Son of Man would come. "Gone over" translates *teleo*, the noun of which the Lord has just used in the preceding verse (:22) in saying that despite persecution for preaching, they must endure to "the end". All this was His intention for the disciples in the first century, but this whole section of Matthew 10 is later repeated in the Olivet Prophecy, which clearly has reference to the last days. When the witness to Israel is ended, then the Lord will return. The whole picture of preaching within Israel whilst enduring fierce persecution is exactly the picture we get from a futuristic understanding of parts of the book of Revelation. I have outlined such an interpretation in my *The Last Days*.

The idea could be that they would still have cities to flee to right up to the point when the Son of Man comes. The preachers of the Gospel will somehow be preserved in the final tribulation- that would appear to be the message, although Rev. 11 and other passages hint that some at least of them will due.

10:24 A *disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his lord*- The Lord is partly speaking to the possible desire in some of the disciples to be martyrs for His cause. Peter's attitude in Gethsemane was clearly of that nature, and some of the disciples came from radicalized, fanatical backgrounds. Martyrdom was a common concept in the first century, and the Lord's warning to flee persecution, to bring about a quiet revolution rather than a political one, was aimed at warning against any desire for a quick, glamorous death for the sake of the Kingdom. In the context, He has warned them to flee persecution (:23). He could be saying that the game plan was that *He* was to die in 'that city' of Jerusalem, but *they* were to seek to preserve their lives so that they could make a longer and more effective witness to Him. They were not 'above' Him- He was the one who had to die as the perfect sacrifice, not them. They were to be 'as' Him in terms of personality (:25), and be satisfied with that- it was to be "enough" for them to bear His reproach (:25). The Lord elsewhere taught Peter that the time for martyrdom would indeed come for Peter- but not right then. So there is the possibility that the Lord is implying 'You are not at this stage *huper* ("above") Me, for the moment, focus on being "as" Me (:25), as disciples learning to copy their teacher'. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Paul later writes that we are indeed to be *huper* Christ, in the sense of being instead of Him, for His sake, in our witness. Thus we are to preach "*huper* Christ... in Christ's stead [*huper* again]" (2 Cor. 5:20), suffering in the work of preaching *huper* Christ (2 Cor. 12:10; Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24), giving our lives *huper* Christ (Acts 15:26), in response to Christ's death *huper* us (Rom. 5:8 and often). So when the Lord taught in Mt. 10:24 that the disciples were not to give their lives *huper* Him their Lord and Master, He might have meant 'at this time'. The time would come, but for then, they were to focus on learning of Him.

10:25 *It is enough*- As explained on :24, the Lord may be teaching that the apostles were not to eagerly choose a martyr's death- that was for Him, not them. It was enough for them that they shared in His sufferings by being slandered as He was.

For the disciple that he be as his Master- See on :24.

If they have called the Master of the house- The head of household. A term often used by the Lord in His parables. And yet He implies that this role is to be functionally aspired to by us. Those instructed in the things of

the Kingdom are like a 'master of the house' (Mt. 13:52), and as the household's master would watch for the thief coming, so *we* are to fulfil His function and watch (Mt. 24:43,44).

Beelzebub- 'Beelzebub' has various possible meanings, but one of them is 'Lord of the house'. By using this term, the Lord's critics were implying He did in fact have a household over whom He was Master and Lord. The Lord is saying that He is the head of the family, the household, and the disciples are His *oikiakos*, His relatives, His family ("them of His household"). This idea of disciples being part of a new family based around their teacher, with them all thereby becoming brothers and sisters, was unheard of in the various schools of the Rabbis. A Rabbi had disciples, but the imagery of family was not used. The family unit was exalted as supreme in importance, and could not be emulated in other contexts. The Lord is teaching that the bonds between Him and His followers were so strong that they were indeed a new family, of more importance and significance than the natural family, which no longer claimed first loyalty in the lives, feelings and self-perceptions of His followers. Even today, this is a radical challenge- for so many turn back from full discipleship because of placing loyalty to family above loyalty to Christ. The reasoning is that what we do for family is done for Christ, and family must come first. But time and again the Lord's teaching is that our spiritual family are to come *before* our natural family. So many divisions and dysfunctions within the Lord's body are caused by those who name His Name insisting on putting their family unity before the unity of *His* family. We can't fellowship *them* because if we do, then uncle Tommy won't fellowship *us*... and so the selfish destruction of the Lord's body continues by those who love themselves more than their Lord.

How much more them of his household!- At first blush, this may seem strange. Usually the charismatic, visible leader attracts more slander than his individual supporters. But we see here the Lord's sensitivity to every individual experience of slander for His sake- for He presumably means 'The sum total of all the suffering of My preachers down the centuries until I return will be far more than what I personally shall suffer from the Jews'. We see here His loveliness- His grace, His generosity of spirit, His sensitivity to all we suffer for Him.

10:26 *Therefore fear them not*- Because of the detailed judgment which is to come, at which every name calling, every suffering, shall be openly revealed for what it is and judged- why fear men and their religious elites, or even death itself (social or literal) at the hands of their persecution.

For there is nothing- The Greek could be translated 'Nobody'. This would fit with the sense of the next verse, which is that we as persons should not hide ourselves but come out in the open now, just as we shall be openly revealed at judgment day.

Covered- The Lord uses the same word to warn against 'covering' our light in the sense of not openly preaching and showing who we are (Lk. 8:16).

That shall not be revealed- Judgment has a sense of 'now, but not yet'. Thoughts are revealed now, both to God and to ourselves (if we are perceptive enough to know ourselves); and this is especially stimulated and enabled by reflection upon the cross (Lk. 2:35 s.w.). And yet the public revealing of our thoughts and who we essentially are will be done publicly at the day of judgment (1 Cor. 3:13 s.w.). In this sense, 'we make the answer now'. More on this huge theme in *Judgment to Come*.

And nothing hid that shall not be known- The Father right now "sees in secret" (Mt. 6:4,6,18 s.w.). So the concept of being able to even be 'hidden' from Him is foolish. Again, we are to live as if we are at judgment day. Therefore our light of the Gospel should not be placed in a 'hidden place' (Lk. 11:33 s.w.)- the idea of *not* preaching, concealing our faith, is foolish because we shall come out in the open about it at the last day anyway. The "secrets of men" (s.w. 'hidden') shall be judged openly (Rom. 2:16), the "hidden things of darkness" will be made manifest (1 Cor. 4:5)- not to God, who sees them right now anyway, but to ourselves and to others. We are therefore to 'come out' with the Gospel now, whatever the cost, and take comfort that "the hidden man [s.w.] of the heart" is noticed by God and it is this which shall be judged (1 Pet. 3:4).

10:27 *What I tell you*- It could be argued that the content of the Gospel which is to be preached is therefore to be the words of Jesus, what He told the disciples. That is certainly how they understood it, for the four Gospel records are transcripts of the early preaching of the Gospel by the disciples, and they are just that- what the Lord told the disciples.

In the darkness- In the same way as the day of judgment will be a bringing to light what was done and said in darkness (:26), we should live now in that transparent spirit, openly speaking the Gospel, not hiding it, bearing in mind that one day and for eternity, it will be openly revealed who we are and what we believe. The Lord later stated that "in secret [s.w. "hid" in :26] have I said nothing" (Jn. 18:20). He was for a moment adopting the perspective of the disciples, just as He does with the language of demons; *to them*, what He was telling them was said in darkness, was hidden. But it was not to remain hidden within their hearts and brain cells, they were to speak it forth *now*, in that they were to live in the spirit of judgment day today. There are many allusions to Job in the New Testament; far more than may be apparent on the surface. Mt. 10:27 is one of them: "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops". The

idea of God telling us things in the ear which we must then openly declare is surely looking back to Job's words in Job 42:5. "Darkness" is also a Job idea; the word occurs at least 30 times in the book. The final appearance of Yahweh in the darkness of the thundercloud was His reproof of Job's repeated suggestion that the darkness of sin somehow separated God from involvement with man. What Job was told out of darkness, he had to speak forth in the light. It seems that Job's spiritual growth is being picked up by the Lord and presented as our pattern. He does the same in Lk. 18:30, another of the allusions to Job in the New Testament, when He speaks of how each of us must give up house, wife, brethren and children for the Kingdom's sake, and then afterwards receive "manifold more in this time, and in the world to come…". This is exactly the position of Job (Job 42:10), and yet the Lord applies it to each of us.

Speak in the light- This verse is repeated in Lk. 12:3 but from a different perspective: "Therefore whatever you have said in the darkness shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors shall be proclaimed upon the housetops". We are to preach upon the housetops what the Lord told us in the ear. But what *we* have spoken in the ear, or whispered, shall likewise be broadcast from the housetops. Nothing will be secret in the day of judgment, and so we are not be secretive about our faith now. We are to live as if we are in the Lord's judgment day presence- because in essence, we are. For judgment is going on right now. John's take on light and darkness is that Jewish society was the darkness in which the light of Christ was shining (Jn. 1:5; 12:46). The Lord may therefore be implying that they were still partially in darkness, and into that darkness He had come and was showing them the light.

And what you hear in the ear- The personal relationship which we have had with Christ will be very evident at the judgment. What we say to Christ in His ear in the bedroom in the darkness, will be openly spoken by Christ at the judgment (Lk. 12:2,3). God dwells in darkness (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:12). Speaking in the bedroom in secret with the knowledge we will be openly rewarded is the language of prayer (Mt. 6:6). Our private relationship with the Lord now, praying to Him in our bedroom, meditating about Him there, will then be spoken out loud. But there is a related statement from the Lord: What we hear from Him in the ear, we must speak openly (Mt. 10:26,27; after the pattern of Isaiah in 22:14). Putting these passages together, we get the picture of us speaking to God through Christ, talking in His ear, as one might whisper something very personal into a friend's ear, in the darkness of our bedroom. And then the Lord whispers back in our ear, i.e. His revelation to us (through the word) is very personal and not perceived by others; but we must openly, publicly act upon it. And this private relationship we have with the Lord in our prayer life will then be revealed openly at the judgment. God told

Samuel "in his ear" about Saul's future, and although the message must have been hard to relay to Saul, Samuel did so, on the housetop (1 Sam. 9:15,25). The similarities with the Lord's words are too close to be accidental. Surely He saw each of us as passing through the essential experience of Samuel. As we witness our relationship with Christ to an unspiritual world now, so He will speak openly of us to God (Mt. 10:32; Rev. 3:5), Angels (Lk. 12:8) and to the world (Lk. 12:2,3). He will openly confess our name, i.e. our character and personality. What we have said to Him privately will be revealed in the light, i.e. in the Kingdom (Col. 1:12). Preaching on the housetops is built on the language of 1 Sam. 9:15,25, where God speaks in Samuel's ear, and then he speaks that word to Saul on the housetop. The Lord is saying that in essence, we are all in Samuel's position; we hear the word of this world's salvation, the word about "the Kingdom" as it was for Saul, and that very fact is in itself the imperative to overcome our natural reservations and share it with those for whom it is intended- even if, as with Saul, we consider them unlikely and unspiritual hearers.

The outcome of the judgment seat will be a reflection of our attitude to witnessing to others: "What you (the twelve disciples) hear in the ear, that preach upon the housetops... *whosoever* therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 10:27,32). The Lord seems to go beyond briefing His men before they set off on their preaching mission; He goes on to say that in a sense, *whoever* follows their example will be confessed before the Father. Notice what He *isn't* saying: He isn't saying that if you're keen about preaching, this is the be-all-and-end-all of spiritual life, and this alone will guarantee your acceptance with God. He says that what we hear (i.e. believe) in the ear, our own very personal understanding and belief of the Gospel, must be spread abroad openly to others. Our salvation is through faith in God's absolute grace; but if it is *real* faith, we will preach it on the housetops, we simply can't keep the knowledge of *such* grace, such great salvation, to ourselves.

Proclaim upon the housetops- According to the Talmud (*Shabbat* 35b), it was the priests who were to proclaim the commencement of the Sabbath by blasts on the shophar from the housetops. Again, the Lord takes language appropriate to the professional religionists and applies it to His largely secular followers. All the time He was seeking to encourage them that *they* were to do this work. And the proclamation of the Kingdom is thus turned into a form of proclaiming a Sabbath of rest. Hebrews uses the language of the Sabbath concerning the Kingdom of God. The idea of teaching upon the housetops what we hear in the ear is language which surely alludes to how Isaiah and the prophets heard God's word in their ear and then taught it to others (Is. 5:9; 50:4). The idea was that the

Lord's followers were not to see the prophets as pale faced, iconic figures- but to realize they were no less than them in their service of God and His Son.

10:28 *And do not be afraid*- The Lord was quite clear that His followers should expect death and serious suffering for preaching Him. He perceived that fear of audience response would be a strong factor in the temptation not to preach Him. But He gave the reason for not fearing in :26- all shall be revealed at the day of judgment. Belief in the doctrine of final judgment therefore has huge impact upon life in practice- in this case, giving us strength not to fear the consequences of our witness. For many believers today, persecution unto death is not a likely consequence of witness; fear of slight embarrassment, being thought 'odd' for turning a conversation around, is a very small price. The Lord is asking us here to accept that witness for Him may well cost us death. If we accept that, accept it as part and parcel of the Lord's basic message, then our approach to witness will be quite different. Fear of audience response will no longer be a major factor, if we have solemnly accepted that we are prepared to die for the sake of preaching the Gospel. Luke's record adds: "I say unto you *My friends*, Be not afraid of them…" (Lk. 12:4). If we are His friends, the friends of the Son of God, the prince of the kings of the earth- why fear audience response when we witness? The laboured assurances of the next verses about being of more value than sparrows etc. are all in the context, therefore, of assuring us that we need not ultimately fear negative response to our witness.

Of those that kill the body but are not able to kill the soul- It is our 'real self' which will eternally endure. In this sense, for the faithful, their body may be killed but their soul cannot be. I take this to mean that who they essentially are is for ever recorded by the Lord, and they will be given that same personality at the resurrection. Significantly, the Bible speaks not of the 'resurrection of the body' [it's the creeds which speak of this], but rather "the resurrection of the just", "the resurrection of the dead". The resurrection is more about resurrected characters than resurrected bodies, although the process will involve a new body being given.

But rather fear Him who is able to destroy- See on 16:25 *lose it*.

Both soul and body- The inference can be drawn that the rejected will have both soul and body destroyed at the last day. This means there must be a resurrection of the body- and then the destruction of that body in the condemnation process, as well as of their "soul". *Psuhe* has a wide range of meaning- sometimes it can mean simply the body, at other times, the essential personality. This too will be destroyed, for the

memory of the rejected will be forgotten, they will cease to exist in all dimensions. There should be a "fear" of rejection; there are more details, more frequently, about the condemnation experience than the joy of acceptance in that day. This is not negative psychology; the Lord in His wisdom knew that this was necessary for us, to keep ever before us the sense of the future we may miss. This should be our fear, far more than death or social rejection by those to whom we witness.

In Gehenna- The Jews believed that 'hell' had three sections: Gehenna, a place of eternal fire for those Jews who broke the covenant and blasphemed God; 'the shades', an intermediate place similar to the Catholic idea of purgatory; and a place of rest where the faithful Jew awaited the resurrection at the last day. This distinction has no basis in the Bible. However, it's significant that the Lord Jesus uses 'Gehenna' and the figure of eternal fire to describe the punishment of people for what the Jews of His day would've considered incidental sins, matters which were far from blasphemy and breaking the covenant – glancing at a woman with a lustful eye (Mk. 9:47), hypocrisy (Lk. 12:1,5; Mt. 23:27–33), not giving a cup of water to a "little one", forbidding a disciple of John the Baptist to follow Jesus (Mk. 9:39–43); not preaching the Gospel fearlessly and boldly (Mt. 10:25–28). These matters were and are shrugged off as of no eternal consequence. But just like the prophets of Israel did, the Lord Jesus seizes upon such issues and purposefully associates them with the most dire possible punishment which His Jewish hearers could conceive – Gehenna. Time and again, the Bible alludes to incorrect ideas and reasons with people from the temporary assumption those ideas might be true. The language of demons, as we will show later, is a classic example. And it's quite possible the Lord is doing the same here with the concept of Gehenna – the punishment for the Jew who breaks the covenant and blasphemes. The Lord was primarily teaching about behaviour, not giving a lecture about the state of the dead. And so He takes the maximum category of eternal punishment known to His audience, and says that this awaits those who sin in matters which on His agenda are so major, even if in the eyes of the Jewish world and humanity generally they were insignificant.

10:29 *Are not two sparrows*- "An inscription of the Emperor Diocletian setting out the maximum prices that might be paid for various articles of commerce shows that sparrows were the cheapest of birds used for food..." (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Leicester: I.V.P., 1992)). This is another example of the Lord's radical collision course with the Rabbis; He taught that God's care even embraces sparrow. For the Rabbis explicitly forbad prayers that mentioned God's care for birds, because they argued that it was dishonouring to God to associate Him with something so small as a bird (*Berith* 5.3). And the Lord purposefully stood that idea upon its head. The Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable

sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others…

Sold for a very small coin- An *assarion* / farthing, the tenth part of a drachma / denarius, which was a day's pay for a labourer. The Matthew record has the Lord saying that two sparrows are sold for one farthing; Luke 12:6 records that He said that five sparrows were sold for two farthings. So what did the Lord really say? I suggest something like this: 'As you know, two sparrows are sold for one farthing, they cost half a farthing each; but often, as you know, *five* sparrows are sold for *two* farthings, they'll throw one extra in for free, they're worth so little'.

And not one of them shall fall on the ground- One sparrow "shall not fall on the ground without (the knowledge of) your Father". God is aware of the death of each bird- He does not allow animals to die due to their natural decay (the clockwork mechanism) without Him being actively involved in and conscious of their death. Again, Jesus shows how God's knowledge and participation in the things of the natural creation must imply an even greater awareness of us. "The very hairs of your head are all numbered… you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:30,31). God hasn't wound up this world and left it ticking by clockwork, dispassionately looking on as Israel and all His people make such a mess of things. He sends the rain, consciously; not a sparrow falls from the air [i.e., as the result of a man's sling stone- for birds die in their nests usually, not in mid-flight] without Him being aware, and, by implication, grieving for it. He even knows how much sparrows are sold for. See on 6:26.

Without your Father- The Lord was "the word made flesh". All that He taught, He in some way experienced and obeyed. In the time of His persecution and death, He fell to the ground literally (same words- Mk.

14:35) as well as figuratively (same words Jn. 12:24); and called out to the "Father". Clearly He had in mind His own earlier teaching; but how hard and demanding it was for Him to live it out.

10:30 *But the very hairs of your head are all numbered*- see 2 Sam. 1:23. The redeemed are a community whom man cannot number (Rev. 7:9), as many as the stars in the sky which neither Abraham nor any man could number. The Lord may be making an allusion to this in order to highlight the scale of knowledge which God has- He numbers the community of believers exactly, over space and over time, and He also numbers the hairs on every one of His people. This vast knowledge of God is often referred to in the Psalms as a guarantee that therefore God will ultimately protect His people. Lk. 21:18, which we have shown to have similarities with the preaching commission of Mt. 10, comments that "there shall not an hair of your head perish". The question is whether the Lord is assuring His preachers that they will not ultimately die; it might sound like it, from such assurance. And yet earlier verses in the preaching commission sound as if the preachers will indeed suffer, quite possibly unto death. And we know that some of them did suffer death. So what are we to make of these assurances of protection, so strong that the preacher should be fearless and not fear death as a consequence for preaching? I suggest that the Lord, as often in His teaching, is speaking on an elevated, spiritual level. The possibility of death for witness is a clear theme of His, especially in Revelation. These strong assurances of protection and salvation from death would therefore be His way of saying that His ultimate salvation of His preachers at the resurrection will involve the preservation of them as unique personalities, down to the hairs of their head. And therefore they should not fear death in this life. For He knows them. The fear of death revolves around the sense that I as the sum of all my experiences, my uniqueness, shall be no more- and the Lord is urging us to believe that God not only knows our unique attributes better than we do, but shall ultimately preserve them in the resurrection of the body and in the nature of the life eternal.

10:31 *Therefore fear not*- The Lord is asking a lot here; He's asking for us to preach without fear of consequence and audience reaction. That is a step beyond preaching knowing the likely price, and being willing to pay that price. To know that price and yet preach without fear is a step beyond being willing to accept consequence.

You are of more value than many sparrows- The same word is used in the same context in Mt. 6:26. Having spoken of how God provides for the birds of the air, the Lord drives home the comparison: "Are you not much better [s.w. "of more value"] than them?". The term is again used in Mt. 12:12: "How much then is a man better than a sheep". We must give full weight to this triple emphasis on how much more valuable we are than

the mortal animals whom God is so careful for. The request that we do not fear is repeated and laboured throughout the section. It is fear of what others think and may do which so often holds us back from witness, be it to family members or literally approaching people on the street. With such laboured assurances, we are to overcome fear and "therefore" preach openly- this is the force of the "therefore" in :32.

10:32- see on 10:27.

Therefore- See on :31 "more value". The sense here is 'accordingly'- in accordance with the colossal emphasis upon not being held back one bit by fear of consequence, we are to accordingly confess Christ before men. The requirement not to fear but to confess is so strong that it could be called a first principle of the Lord's teaching. We are to be fearless in witness.

Everyone who shall confess me before men- Confessing Christ before men can also be an allusion to baptism, not just bucking up the courage to give someone a tract at work (Mt. 10:32 = Rom. 10:9,10). This allusion is confirmed when we realize that "confess" translates two Greek words, 'to confess in'. We confess in Christ by baptism into Him. In another sense, our witness is because we are in Christ, we are Him to the world, and therefore His fearlessness unto death in witness should be ours. The Lord spoke of how if we confess Him before men, He will confess knowledge of us before the Father; and if we deny Him, He will deny us. This language is applied by John to John the Baptist- for he comments that John the Baptist "confessed and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ" (Jn. 1:20). In this sense, John Baptist is being set up as our example in preaching- and again, John comments that we too are to confess the Son and not deny Him (1 Jn. 2:23), after the pattern of John the Baptist. And yet note what John's 'confession' was- it was a profession of his unworthiness, that although he was the herald of the Christ, he was not Jesus. Again, we see here a pattern for our witness to the Lord. Eph. 6:15 speaks of our each being 'sandaled' with the preparation of the Gospel. Who prepared the way of the Lord by preaching, wearing sandals? John the Baptist. It seems Paul is alluding to John here, setting him up as the preacher's example. The reference to "loins girt" (Eph. 6:14) would also be a John allusion- the record twice (in Mt. 3:4; Mk. 1:6) stresses how John had his 'loins girded'.

When He says He will confess *us* before the Father, He means He will confess *our name* before God (Rev. 3:5); He knows us according to our names / characters. He speaks of ecclesial members as "names" in Rev. 3:4; He calls His own sheep by name, and they each know His voice, responding to His word *individually*. The call to one sheep will only be recognized by that sheep; the others won't respond (Jn. 10:3). He will take individual note of each sheep, treating them accordingly, as the shepherd leads more gently those that are with young (Is. 40:11). It

seems that even now, we each have our own individual name with the Father and Son, encompassing their understanding of our essential character. It may even be that in the record of Scripture, God inspired the writers to record the names of individuals according to His judgment of them (or at least, how the faithful viewed them at the time), rather than by the names they actually went under. What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil, Num. 1:15), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names.

The same two words for "confess [in]" are found in Rom. 10:9 "If you shall *confess with* your mouth the Lord Jesus… you shall be saved". The idea of *homolegeo* seems to be of public confession; literally to *homo-logos*. The Lord has just used the word *logos* with reference to the "words" of our preaching before men (10:14). *Homo* has the sense of being together with others. It can carry the sense of 'assent', in that our *logos* comes together with the *logos* of another; but the majority of NT usage is clearly with the sense of professing, making our *logos* before others. At the day of judgment, the Lord will "profess" His verdict to men (Mt. 7:23) and here we learn that He will "profess" it to His Father too. The weight of evidence on the basis of usage is that this word refers to public profession of a *logos*, of our innermost thought- which is exactly in line with the themes of the Sermon on the Mount: that our internal thought and position, our *logos*, is crucially important; but if it is a Christ-like *logos* then it will be impossible to conceal it, it must naturally become public, for a city set on a hill cannot be hid. Consider the evidence:
-Herod *confessed* [AV "promised"] with an oath" in front of witnesses to give Herodias' daughter whatever she wished (Mt. 14:7)
- John the Baptist *confessed* in his preaching (Jn. 1:20)
- If anyone *confessed* openly that Jesus was Messiah, then they would be cast out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22; 12:42)
- The Pharisees *confessed* their doctrinal positions, i.e. they openly taught them (Acts 23:8)
- Paul *confessed* his beliefs publicly when on trial (Acts 24:14)
- Timothy *confessed* his confession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:12)
- Some openly *confess* their knowledge of God when their private lives don't match that public confession (Titus 1:16)
- The faithful *confessed* their faith in God's promises before all (Heb. 11:13)
- Teachers *confess* a doctrinal position about Jesus in their teaching and must be assessed by their audience accordingly (1 Jn. 2:23; 4:2,3,15; 2 Jn. 7).

In Matthew 10, the Lord uses the word in the very context of the need to openly witness. He who refuses to make this public profession will not be

accepted in the day of judgment; the Lord Jesus will not confess such a person before "My Father". Rom. 10:9,10 likewise predicate salvation upon this public confession. And the contrast in Matthew 10:32,33 is between *confessing* Christ and *denying* Him before men, leading to being *denied* by Jesus before "My *Father*". Without doubt, 1 Jn. 2:23 has all this in mind when teaching that "Whosoever *denies* the Son, the same has not *the Father*, but he that *confesses* [s.w.; AV "acknowledges"] the Son has the Father also". Taken together, these usages of *confession* present a solid case- that salvation is related to public confession. That is not to say that salvation is by works, nor is it to say that evangelism is the be all and end all of the Christian life- after all, we all have different gifts, some are more pastoral than evangelical. Salvation is by grace *through faith*; and if we believe, then we cannot be passive, we become a city set on a hill which cannot be hid. Otherwise, as the Lord teaches several times in the Sermon on the Mount, we have not really believed in God's grace. The Sermon teaches that there is no such thing as a secret Christian, a candle lit which nobody else sees or gets a hint of. The absolute necessity of public confession was taught throughout the Sermon, and it is being made plain again here in Mt. 10 and throughout the other references to confession. In this area particularly, we are faced with the temptation of sins of omission- to consider that we are believers because we have mentally assented to certain theological propositions about Christ, but not making any public commitment or confession about them. No wonder the Lord raised this theme in encouraging His preachers to go forth fearlessly.

I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven- The "also" suggests there will be a direct correlation between our confessing of Him before men now, and how He speaks of us before the Father both now and in the last day. The same idea is found in the way in which He earlier taught that we are forgiven *as* we forgive others. What's going on in Heaven concerning us need be no mystery to us- because it is a direct reflection of our lives of forgiveness, witness etc. in this world. The future judgment seat will be only a bringing to earth of the judgment seat which even now is going on in Heaven. Mt. 10:32 surely also has in view the Lord's speaking to the Father in Heaven right now, in this life. But compare the parallel Lk. 12:8: "Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God". Of what does this speak? Surely of the last judgment [note the reference to the "Son of man", a term usually used about judgment to come; and denial before the angels surely equates with the "I never knew you" of the final judgment]. The events of the last day, with the Lord confessing or denying us before the Father and the Angels, are actually going on this very day.

10:33 *But whoever shall deny me*- The whole purpose of the true church is to be a light to the world- "the only cooperative society in the world that exists for the benefit of its non-members", as William Temple put it. The Lord will tell some in the last day that He never knew them, He will deny them; and yet He will deny those who never confessed Him before men (Mt. 8:23; 10:32,33). These people will have prophesied in His Name [i.e. preached to the ecclesia], and done "mighty works" for Him; but the fact they didn't confess Him before men is seen as not knowing Him; for to know Him is to perceive that we are intended to confess Him before men. This, perhaps, is our greatest danger. The presence and witness of God is no longer in a tent in the Sinai, nor in a Jerusalem temple. God reveals Himself through the group of ordinary, mixed up folks who comprise the ecclesias. For the watching world, we present proof that Christ is indeed alive; we provide the visible shape of what God and Jesus are really like. This is how vital is the matter of witness. It is utterly fundamental to the whole purpose behind our having been called. If we deny Christ, we deny that Jesus is the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22); and yet we deny Christ if we don't preach Him (Mt. 10:33). It follows that if we really believe that Jesus was not just Jesus of Nazareth but the Christ of God, therefore we won't deny Him but will preach Him. This is why there is connection between confessing Jesus as Christ and preaching Him (Jn. 9:22; Acts 18:5; Phil. 2:11). A grasp of who the Lord Jesus really is and the height of His present exaltation will naturally result in a confession of Him to the world, as well as a deep personal obedience to His word and will (Heb. 2:1).

There are at least three Biblical examples of people denying Jesus- the same Greek word is used- and yet repenting. Peter denied the Lord "before all" (Mt. 26:70), and yet was restored. The entire crowd around Jesus, including the healed woman, initially 'denied' they had touched Jesus (Lk. 8:45); but the woman then came out into the open and confessed Christ before all. The Jews 'denied' Christ (Acts 3:13,14) but then repented and were baptized publicly. The point is, that in the moments when we deny Him, He denies us; but we can change the situation.

It's tempting to wonder whether all this talk of confession and denial is only really relevant to those standing trial for their Christian faith, with the threat of death before them and the possibility of saving their life if they make some symbolic denial of Christ. But the words for confessing and denying occur together in Tit. 1:16 about those within the ecclesia who "Profess [s.w. 'confess'] that they know God, but in works *deny* Him". We can make the profession of faith before men, and in the public confession of baptism- whilst effectively denying the faith in our lives. There were some within the ecclesias of the first century who 'denied' the Lord (2 Pet. 2:1). External membership can appear as

‘confession’, but the point is that it isn’t necessarily. It can actually be a front for denial of Him…

Before men I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven- There is a direct correlation between our attitudes to witnessing before men now, and the attitude of the Lord Jesus about us in Heaven “before”, or ‘before the face of’, the Father. Witnessing is essentially personal, each of us individually “before men”. As modern life progresses in reducing relationships to online abstractions, we must remember this. An individual may press the right keys on their keyboard, send money online to a preaching organization- and yet never be making any witness about Christ before the faces of men. Indeed, those with whom the person does have face to face relationships may well be totally unaware he is a Christian. It’s this kind of thing which the Lord is addressing in such demanding terms- our witness *before men*, not in some anonymous world of avatars, is related to how we witnesses about us *before the face of God in Heaven*.

10:34 *Think not that I came to send peace on earth*- The Lord surely has in mind what He has just commanded in 10:13, where He uses the same words to describe how the apostles were to let their *peace come* upon the households they entered- the peace of *shalom* with God, the salvation of Jesus. But that peace could return to them unclaimed, and the Lord's words here in :34 seem to imply that He is warning them that generally, their message of peace will not be accepted. In the exposition of 10:13,14 I suggested that the households being visited were those who had initially responded to the message about Jesus as preached by John. The sad reality was that many of these did not further respond to the peace offered to them in Christ.

"Peace on the earth” is an allusion to the prophecies of peace in the Messianic Kingdom, and to the Angelic proclamation that there would be peace on earth through Christ (Lk. 2:14). The disciples were prone to be influenced by Jewish expectations and hopes for an imminent Messianic Kingdom to be established. The Lord's point is therefore surely that they were not to preach a gospel of immediate peace on earth, but rather one to come in the future; He made the point later that He had come to take peace from the earth (Rev. 6:4), but of course He offered *peace with God* through forgiveness and reconciliation which He would achieve through His life and death (Col. 1:20).

I came not to send peace- The context is the Lord telling His preachers to 'come' to households and pronounce the 'coming' [s.w.] of peace (10:13). But He is warning them that the potential will typically not be realized; only a few individuals within those households would accept the message, and effectively they were going to be breaking up those households

because of the total loyalty to Christ and the new household in Him which they were to demand. Their coming to those households was effectively His personal coming to them- for in the work of witness they were Him, just as we are too. Who wants to break up another's household? I found myself thinking about that after coming to realize the social and relational results of baptizing individuals into Christ in Moslem families and societies. We can only do so if we are utterly convinced that the only ultimate household worth belonging to is that in the body of Christ.

But a sword- The *machaira* was really a dagger, suggesting interpersonal conflict and hatred. He wanted His preachers to be under no illusion as to the result of people accepting their message; there would be acceptance of it on a national level, the implication is that the Lord expected individuals to accept it, and to suffer in their relationships and family life as a result of it. This needs to be remembered in our preaching too. We are not offering an easy life now, of peace and happiness on all fronts- but rather peace with God and hope in the future Kingdom of God on earth.

10:35 *For I came to set a man at variance against*- The single Greek word translated here is a form of the noun for 'two'. The division would be down one line, into two groups- the household of origin, and the household of Christ, where He was head of the household. Division within families, especially between sons and fathers, was seen as far more awful than it is today. But the offer of Christ to be Lord, to be our head, is so compelling and colossal in implication that there can simply be no other option than division, at least emotionally and psychologically, between those members of a household who accept Him as Lord and head, and those who will not. The implications of what the Lord is teaching here outlaws any thought of marriage out of the faith; to consciously create a divided family from the start can only reflect a very low level of commitment to Him as Lord, Master and household head.

His father and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law- Why these specific examples? Perhaps the Lord envisaged the younger generation being more responsive than their elders. But maybe His point was that the younger members of an extended family were expected to obey the head of the household- and the good news of His Kingdom, His dominion over men and women, was that loyalty was no longer to be to the head of the family, but to Him. For He was offering men and women entrance into a new King-dom, where He was King and His dominion was accepted in the lives of those who accepted the Gospel of that Kingdom.

10:36 And *a man's foes shall be they of his own household*- Jewish thought was that their enemies were the Romans, and Zechariah's song

reflects this expectation- that Messiah was to save Israel from her foes (s.w. Lk. 1:71,74). The Lord is redefining things. The foes were no longer to be the Gentiles, but all those who rejected the Gospel. For a strongly family based society, this was an almost impossibly high bar to jump. But the implication was that those who accepted it would not be alone, but would be making the sacrifice in order to take their place in a new family. For those raised within believing households, the radical nature of the call to leave family is hard to appreciate. One can understand all the positive hopes and often unrealistic expectations held by those who do break with their families in order to come to Christ, and their difficulty in finding that many long established members within the new household are sceptical and highly critical of the community. The Lord's teaching about the cost of following Him in terms of loss of relationships must be given its full weight. Loss of relationships, especially family ones, is part of following Him in spirit and truth.

The use of "own" in "own household" suggests that the believer was still to accept his or her unbelieving family as their own.

10:37 *He that loves father or mother more than me is*- This is the language of Levi (Dt. 33:9), encouraging the disciples that they, secular men that they largely were, must consider themselves the new priesthood by whom Israel were to be taught and saved.

Not worthy of Me- We must supply something for the "Me"; the idea is surely that we are not worthy of His love and death for us, of *His* family, if we love *our* family members more than Him. The contrast is between "Me" and our earthly families. 'Worthiness' was an idea associated in the first century mind with families. We cannot be worthy of membership in His family if we choose to identify ourselves as members of our natural family first and foremost. On one hand we are never worthy of Christ, and yet He implies here that He does consider us worthy of Him *if* we respond. This is not the same as salvation by works in the sense that Paul later decries; it is salvation by grace through faith, but faith without works is dead. There must be some response. The idea that we can never be worthy of Christ is therefore quite simply wrong, or at best poorly worded and inadequate. He speaks here of being worthy of Him by sacrificing family relationships; and being not worthy of Him by refusing to sacrifice them.

And he that loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me- Huper Christ means just that in the accusative, "more than" Him. But the idea of *huper* in relation to the Lord is used many times in the NT concerning His death "for" or *huper* us. It would seem likely that the Lord had His death for us in mind at this point, for He goes straight on to speak of how we are to take up our cross and follow Him to His death on Golgotha (:38). The shift of thought towards the cross in :38 is more

natural if we perceive that He is already thinking of it in :37 when speaking of our being worthy of 'Him', i.e. His death for us.

10:38 *And he that does not take his cross*- The context is about the preaching of the Gospel. It is not at all glamorous. We should be ready to die a martyr's death. That is the clear teaching here. The context before and after this teaching about the cross is of preaching the Gospel and suffering persecution and broken relationships because of it. This, then, is the sense in which the Lord foresaw many of us suffering for His sake. We are bidden carry His cross (Mt. 20:23; Gal. 6:12), and yet also our own cross (Mt. 10:38). In our cross-experiences, those times when there is no other Christian option but to shoulder it... *then* we know something of the cross of the Lord, and then He is actively aware of that small kindred between His cross and ours. He remembers how it was, and sees the commonality of feeling which we have attained.

And follow after me, is not worthy of me- Reflect on a Gospel parallel to see the huge importance of being a disciple of Jesus. In Mt. 10:38 the Lord says that whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow after Him, "is not worthy of me". In Lk. 14:27 we have the same words, but concluded with "… the same cannot be my disciple". To be a disciple of the Lord is to be worthy of Him. To seek to walk as He walked, to follow behind Him, is to be worthy of Him. The important thing is to follow, for all our stumblings, but at least to be in the way behind Him. I have made the point that the instructions regarding witnessing here have their equivalent in the Olivet prophecy, and they may particularly refer to our preaching just before the Lord's return. At that time especially, "a man's foes shall be they of his own household", and therefore "he that takes not his cross (then), and follows after Me, is not worthy". Our response to our trials then during the tribulation will effectively be our judgment seat.

Consider the contexts in which the Lord spoke of taking up His cross:
(1) In Luke 9:23-26 He tells the crowds that they have come to His meetings because of the intriguing miracles of the loaves and fishes. The Lord is saying: 'Don't follow me because of the loaves and fishes; take up my cross'!
(2) The rich young man was willing to be obedient in everything apart from parting with his wealth. In this context, of asking the most difficult thing for him to do, the Lord spoke of taking up His cross - in the man's case, giving up his wealth.
(3) The command to take up the cross in Mt. 10:38 is in the context of the Lord's description of the family problems which would be caused by responding to His word. Presumably some were willing to follow Christ if they didn't have to break with their families; but He asks them to take up the cross in this sense.

In all of these cases people were willing to follow the Lord - but only

insofar as it didn't hurt them. They were unwilling to take on board the idea of consciously deciding to do something against the grain of their natures and immediate surroundings. Yet this is what taking up the cross is all about, and it is vital for our identification with our Lord. It is very easy to serve God in ways which reinforce the lifestyles we choose to have anyway; it is easy to obey Divine principles only insofar as they compound our own personality. By doing so we can deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritually active when, in reality, we have never walked out against the wind, never picked up the cross of Christ.

10:39 *He that finds his life*- The Lord must surely mean us to read in an ellipsis: 'Thinks he has found the meaning of life without Me'. For the Lord has just called the unsaved audience of His preachers "the lost" (10:6 s.w.).

Shall lose it- The Lord has just spoken of how God will "destroy" (s.w. "lose") the "soul" (s.w. "life") of those rejected at the last day (10:28). So here in :39 He is surely thinking of destruction of the 'soul' / "life" at the last day. Only those responsible to judgment will appear at the day of judgment; so the Lord's teaching here concerns those who have known Him, who are responsible to Him, but who are not totally committed to Him; those who think that despite their knowledge of Him, they can 'find their lives' without Him. See on 16:25 *lose it*.

And he that loses his life for my sake- The same Greek word is translated to destroy, to die, to mar, to cause to perish. Once again, this is not what we wish to hear- that we must do real damage to our human life, crucify it, if we are to share in the life of Jesus. 10:28 has just spoken of the destroying / losing of life in condemnation; perhaps the 'loss / destruction of life' is in self-condemnation. This would continue a major theme of the Lord's teaching- that those who condemn themselves in this life shall be saved from condemnation at the last day.

Shall find it- As we go up the spiral of spiritual growth, we will find the true life- perceive, see, realize (Mt. 10:39 Gk.) the real, spiritual life, as the wayward son "came to himself", he found himself, when he repented. The Lord had laboured the point that whoever seeks shall *find* (Mt. 7:7,8,14), and the context clearly is of spiritual things and salvation. The Lord spoke in Mt. 7 of *seeking* and finding, here He speaks of *losing life* in order to find it. The language of seeking and losing suggests a process, rather than some finely spoken, albeit genuinely intended, momentary statement of commitment to the Lord. The more we *seek* the things of the Kingdom, the more we will naturally lose our fleshly life. The loss of life the Lord has in view is clearly a process of "seeking" the things of His Kingdom- rather than the death of martyrdom. The taking up of the cross in the previous verse is the epitome of losing life… but the Lord intended it to be understood as a way of life, a sharing of the same road as Him ["following" Him], upon which dying is literally a way *of* life as well as the

way *to* life. What in practice does it mean to 'lose life'? Issues concerning where we live, careers, food, the pleasures of this life, all become eclipsed by the mission before us- of consciously dying, *in His service*. For the entire context here is about serving the Lord by sharing the Gospel with others, engaging fully with the mission the Lord intends for us. The context of the Lord giving His people work to do would suggest that the life which is 'found' is not only the life eternal at the last day, but is the life in His service. This kind of life will be eternally lived, and it is in that sense that we can understand the Lord's words elsewhere that those who follow Him right now begin living the eternal life, the kind of life in His service which they will eternally live. If we are ever seeking to balance and arrange things so that we can apparently live our fleshly life as well as 'His' life, then we have failed to grasp the entire point of His teaching. Total surrender, absolute and eager, willing submission, is what He is about.

10:40 *He that receives you receives me, and he that receives me receives him that sent me*- The Lord is speaking of 'receiving' His preachers and materially supporting them (:13). He's saying that every act of support given to them is done as it were directly to Him. He has the same idea in Mt. 25:35-45- whatever was done to "the least of these My brothers" was done to Him. His "little ones", the disciples / preachers in their immaturity (:42), were all the same His, and whatever was done to them was done to Him and to His Father. We note that Mt. 25 speaks of material support of food, clothing, hospitality to the unknown and visiting in prison- all exactly in the context of the preaching mission He sent His disciples on. Whatever more general reference there may be in Mt. 25:35-45, clearly the primary reference was to the Lord's future judgment of those who claimed to be His (who had accepted John the Baptist's message), in accordance to whether or not they had materially supported the disciples on their preaching mission. Luke's version of this teaching records that the Lord said that "He that *hears* you, hears Me" (Lk. 10:16). The 'receiving' was therefore of the message and therefore receiving the disciples personally (10:14 "receive you… hear your words"). We are the voice and face of Jesus to people- it's a concept colossal in its implications. Our attitude to receiving or accepting each other is our acceptance or rejection of Jesus personally. Hence Paul tells the Galatians that they had "received me… as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14), surely alluding to the Lord's teaching here. We are to "receive one another, as Christ also received us" (Rom. 15:7).

The idea of *shaliach*, whereby someone's representative was seen as them, was well known in Judaism; the Lord is almost quoting it here, and He does the same in the next verse. Realizing this is going on is a key to correct interpretation of the next verses.

10:41 *He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward*- This is a quotation of well-known Jewish thinking. I have shown multiple times in this commentary that the Lord was seeking to encourage His followers that they were no less than Moses, the prophets and the "righteous men" of the Old Testament. The context here is encouraging them that they are worthy labourers, worthy to receive material support from those they stay with. The 'receiving' of them on their preaching mission (:13) is the 'receiving' the Lord now has in view. His idea is that just as those who received Old Testament prophets will receive a prophet's reward at the last day, possibly 'from the prophet' as the Greek could mean- so just as much those who materially support the disciples will be rewarded. Such supporters will in no wise lose their reward (:42) – just as surely as those who supported Old Testament prophets will be rewarded, to no lesser extent, those who supported the disciples would likewise be rewarded.

10:42 *And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple; truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward*- Giving a cup of cold water to the little ones doesn't necessarily refer to sticking banknotes in a collection for Oxfam. The Hebrew writer took it as referring to our love for Christ's little ones, within the ecclesia (Mt. 10:42 = Heb. 6:10). And the context says the same. The Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as none less than the likes of Elisha, who were supported in their work by various well-wishers.

According to the interpretation of :41, these "little ones" refer to the disciples. But why "*these* little ones" and not "you"? I suggest that verse 42 is effectively a soliloquy, perhaps spoken out loud in the presence of the disciples, but all the same, it is Jesus speaking to Himself.

CHAPTER 11

11:1 *And it came to pass when Jesus had finished commanding his twelve disciples*- Vine feels that the *dia* in *diatasso* ["commanding"] suggests "a distributive force: giving to each his appropriate charge". In this case we see the initial application of the parables about the servants being each given a specific work to do. That work was to preach to specific people whom the Lord intended for each of the disciples. Those parables apply to us- perhaps in that we are each intended to take the Gospel to specific individuals. If we fail in that work, there is no guarantee that the Lord will give that work to others; the harvest will simply not be gathered as it could have been.

He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities- Without their presence (as they were away on their preaching tour), the Lord went to their home areas. He showed by this how He saw out witness amongst those whom we know and our families to be of the utmost importance- and He was and is willing and eager to back up our credibility in such witness.

11:2 *Now when John heard about the works of the Christ while in prison, he sent word by his disciples*- AV "Sent two of his disciples". It can't be insignificant that John sends two disciples out just after the Lord had sent out *His* disciples two by two in Matthew 10. Surely this is a literary device to set up John in negative contrast to the Lord at this time; John sent out his pair of disciples in response to his crisis of faith. He knew Jesus was to do mighty works- but he had heard of them only by report. Those he sent out had already heard and seen the Lord's miracles (:4), and yet John sends them to Jesus to ask if He is Messiah. It all reads rather negatively about John. It could even be that he died at a low point in his faith, and yet the Lord's positive comment about Him surely suggests that He saw John as being ultimately saved. The records of the Kings of Israel and Judah, along with various passages in Ezekiel 18, place great emphasis upon how a man *finishes* his spiritual journey, and yet there are also Biblical examples of faithful men dying at low ebb spiritually; this will not necessarily exclude from the Kingdom, and John the Baptist may be another example.

11:3 *And said to him: Are you he that comes*- The emphasis may be on the word "you". The coming one was a well-known term for Messiah, based upon Ps. 118:26.

Or look we for another?- Despite John's clearly stated belief that Jesus was the promised bridegroom, the lamb of God and Son of God (Jn. 1:29-34), it seems things had not gone according to the prophetic program John had imagined- and he now had doubts about Jesus. For a man claiming (at least implicitly) to be Messiah, it would've been an unnecessary question to ask Him 'Are you Messiah?'. It could be inferred

that John still believed in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, but had begun to wonder if He was only the *herald* of "another" whom they should be looking for in order to establish the Kingdom. It could be that John's understanding of himself as the Elijah prophet had led him to expect that all Israel would repent, and then Messiah Himself would come and establish His Kingdom immediately. For this is indeed how the prophecies of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4 could be read. Perhaps John was full of such self-doubt that he wondered if he really had been the Elijah prophet, and was thinking that maybe he had just heralded the Elijah prophet, Jesus, who was in turn to herald "He that should come". This is the problem with holding a dogmatic view of prophetic sequences- when they prove wrong, either because our interpretation was faulty or because human lack of response means they are to come true in another way than ideally planned, then often peoples' faith in Christ Himself is damaged. If we have an open ended view of prophecy, whereby we understand it to state possibilities which may have other ways of fulfilment than what is ideally intended, then such crises don't arise. "Look we for another?" doesn't sound as if John was simply asking for a sign, in the spirit of Gideon. He had major questions about the whole prophetic program, sensing that something had changed; the word for "another" is also translated "altered" (Lk. 9:29). In this sense, his question may not necessarily reflect a crisis of faith in Jesus personally, but rather an earnest desire to know the new details of the revised prophetic program.

So even John the Baptist, whose teaching had prepared most of the twelve to accept Jesus, seems to have not been altogether clear about what we might consider fundamental things. He speaks here of Jesus as "the one to come", a commonly understood description of the Elijah prophet, based on the phrase being used about him in Mal. 3:1- and not of Messiah Himself. Thus John the Baptist anticipated that this "one to come", his cousin Jesus, would be a refining fire (Mt. 3:12)- which is exactly Malachi's language about the Elijah prophet (Mal. 3:2; 4:1). This would explain why John the Baptist had apparent 'doubts' whilst in prison as to whether Jesus really was the Messiah. And it would also explain why the disciples expected Jesus to act like Elijah in Lk. 9:52-56. It was not until the baptism of Jesus that John the Baptist came to understand Jesus as the "one to come"; so the preparatory work which he had done with the disciples must have had what we would call a flimsy doctrinal basis. When Jesus called them to follow Him, and they so quickly obeyed, it is often assumed that John the Baptist had prepared them for this. But that preparation must at best have been very shallow and incomplete, given John's own admission that he did not recognize Jesus for who He was until His baptism. Why, however, was John's misunderstanding recorded in the Gospel records? Or the misunderstanding of his father Zacharias, that John was in fact the promised Messiah, "the prophet", the one would bring forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Romans (Lk. 1:71-79)? Perhaps for the same reason as the language of demons is used,

especially to describe the miracles at the beginning of the Lord's ministry. He didn't correct this. But over time it became evident that the sheer power of the Son of God meant that in practice, demons didn't exist. Likewise, as the ministry of Jesus unfolds to us in the Gospel records, it becomes apparent that He was Son of God, the Messiah- and not merely an Elijah prophet.

11:4 *And Jesus answered and said to them: Go and tell John-* They had already told him once- the same word is used for how they initially had told John these things (Lk. 7:18). There is definitely the sense that John needed to work through the implications of what he was hearing, rather than having some specific explanation from the Lord.

The things which you hear and see- The request that John 'hear' these reports more carefully begs connection with the Lord's frequent comment that the Jews heard but did not really hear (e.g. Mt. 13:13-17). John's lack of understanding appears to be in some sense culpable and at best disappointing to the Lord. The Lord is seeking to assure John that if he just thinks about the evidence, it's clear that Jesus is indeed Messiah, and as John had earlier preached- Son and lamb of God, who saves His people from their sins. He seems to be saying that that was so wonderful and fundamental, that the rearrangement of the prophetic timetable is in a sense irrelevant compared to that. Whether or not the timing or chronology of events surrounding the Kingdom comes true as we expect, or whether or not we discern how God has re-planned the fulfilment of prophecy- is all irrelevant compared to the wonder of knowing Jesus as the Christ and personal Saviour.

11:5 *The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear and the dead are raised up-* The teaching of Jesus included frequent quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament. When we go back and read around the contexts of the passages He quoted, it becomes apparent that He very often omits to quote the negative, judgmental, or conditional aspects of the blessings which He quotes. Consider the way He quotes Is. 29:18; 35:5,6 and 61:1 in Mt. 11:5,6. These are all talking about Messianic blessings. But they are embedded amidst warnings of judgment and the conditionality of God's grace. Likewise Luke records how Jesus read from Is. 61:1,2, but He stopped at the very point where Isaiah's message turns from promise to threat. None of this takes away from the terrible reality that future failure is a real possibility, even tomorrow. We can throw it all away. We may do. We have the possibility. And some do. There is an eternity ahead which we may miss. And each one who enters the Kingdom will, humanly speaking, have come pretty close to losing it at various points in his or her mortal life. But the Lord's positivity is a powerful example.

And the poor have good tidings preached to them- This was as remarkable and significant as the previous miraculous signs, of the blind

seeing etc. There was a deep impression that religion was for the middle class or wealthy. Teachers didn't bother preaching to the poor because there was no possibility of financial support coming from them. Yet the Lord opened His manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount by saying that His message was especially intended for "the poor" (Mt. 5:3 s.w.). In many Christian circles, the same is true today. Churches need money (or, they think they do), and so their focus is not on taking the Gospel to the poor but rather to the potential tithers. The disciples were amazed that the rich wouldn't be saved (Mt. 19:24,25), so deeply ingrained was this idea that spirituality and wealth were somehow supposed to go together. The Lord was teaching the opposite. There's no doubt that the Gospel is designed for the poor; and that if one were to bring "the poor" *en masse* into many churches / ecclesias today, the existing membership would up and go somewhere else. The Spirit was clearly upon the Lord Jesus exactly *because* He preached the Gospel to the poor (Lk. 4:18). Our preaching attitude to "the poor" is a reflection of our spirituality. "The poor" in the immediate context were the disciples, for the Lord had just looked upon them in love and commented: "Blessed are you poor" (Lk. 6:20). In the response of "the poor" to Him, the Lord saw a Divine confirmation of His ministry. And it is the same with us. Our ministry is to take the Gospel to the unbelieving poor, and not to get middle class Christian religionists to shift churches and allegiance to our group. James 2:5 is clear that God chooses the poor *more than* the rich to be heirs of His Kingdom; so in this case, our preaching focus should be specifically towards them.

11:6 *And blessed is he, whoever shall find no cause to stumble over me*- Clearly the Lord saw John as likely to be about to stumble. As explained earlier, the cause of stumbling was [and is to this day] that the Lord at times makes changes in the outworking of His prophetic program. Because things haven't gone just as mere humans imagined it, because they can't get their heads around God's huge sensitivity to human repentance and choices, nor His subsequent willingness to change His timetable to accommodate that… therefore people stumble at Christ. The Lord encountered a similar situation in Nazareth, where people again were "offended in Him" (Mt. 13:57) because His Messiahship was not as they supposed it ought to be. Likewise the death of the Messiah by crucifixion caused even the disciples to be offended- it was simply not how they had imagined Messiah's salvation. They were "offended" exactly because He was 'smitten' (Mt. 26:31), even though the Lord had warned them ahead of time about His death so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The cross was therefore a rock of offence to many (1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). So often we see the process- people come to Jesus with preconceived notions of how things should be, and fit those notions into the structure of their 'Christianity'. But the Christ's most fundamental teachings may in fact outlaw their beloved notions and favourite suppositions. And because their imagination of Jesus doesn't fit in with

who He actually is- they stumble. It's like falling in love with an idea of a person, rather than with the person as they actually are. God's word presents Jesus as He actually is, and it is this which we must accept, allowing it thereby to jettison all preconceived notions we have of Him. The parable of the sower taught that persecution leads to people being offended (Mt. 13:21), and John was certainly undergoing persecution for the word there in prison. But persecution leads to spiritual stumbling largely because of the dashed expectations- that with Christ, all shall go well for us, and we in this life shall be delivered from problems. But the Lord is stressing throughout His teaching that that Jewish conception of Messiah and Messiah's Kingship over men was simply incorrect. Those who followed Him would suffer and die, in one form or another, the death of the cross.

The Lord tried not to offend people (Mt. 17:27) and yet people were indeed offended in Him. But in Mt. 18:6-9 He makes offence of others a serious sin. In this connection of thought we see an example of where there are some things which can be said of Jesus, some things He could do, which we simply cannot do. In forgiving others, we are often challenged to forgive *as* the Lord does. Not all that He does can be replicated by us, nor indeed is it possible. Thus for us, forgiveness is usually a process, whereas for the Father and Son it appears to be more instantaneous.

11:7 *And as these went their way, Jesus began to say to the crowds concerning John: What did you go out into the wilderness to see?-* The crowds whom the Lord was addressing were therefore eager listeners of John, even perhaps in a sense his disciples. We see her the fulfilment of John's commission- to prepare *in the wilderness* a smooth way for the coming of the Messianic King of glory. But the crowds didn't respond, and Messiah didn't come in His glorious Kingdom. I suggested on 10:11 that the mission of the disciples was initially to those who had responded to John the Baptist's teaching; and now whilst they were away on their preaching tour doing such follow up work, the Lord was doing the same, addressing a crowd who had also responded to John enough to trek out into the wilderness to hear him.

A reed shaken with the wind?- The reference is probably to the reeds growing in the Jordan where John baptized. Just as the people didn't go there to look at the reeds but at John as God's prophet, so the Lord is hinting that they should not look on John's weakness but upon who he essentially was. When John the Baptist had this crisis of faith, the Lord spoke of John to the multitude as if he was a strong believer, no reed shaken in the wind of doubt. And yet He didn't just paper over John's doubts and forget them, pretending He hadn't seen. The message He returned to John encouraged him to look back to the Isaiah prophecies of Messiah, and to remember especially the way that the weak, doubting

ones would be made strong. The Lord evidently sought to strengthen the weak John by this allusion. The language of being *shaken* by *wind* is used elsewhere by the Lord in describing the process of condemnation at the last day (both Greek words are found in Mt. 7:25,27). The Lord's idea may therefore be: 'Sure, John is wavering at this very moment. But when you saw him in the wilderness, he wasn't; and in God's eyes, even now, he's not shaking in the wind, he's not going to be condemned at the day of judgment- even though, as you've just heard, he has his doubts and weaknesses'. Perhaps the Lord had John in mind when He soon afterwards spoke of how He would not condemn even a broken reed (s.w.- Mt. 12:20), but rather still use it as a channel for the oil of the Spirit. The whole situation with John is helpful in coping with others who clearly are passing through times of trial which is resulting in their faith wavering. Think positively of who they were, have been, and still essentially are…

11:8 *But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments?-* The allusion is surely to Herod and Herodias, who had imprisoned John. John's clothing was rugged, not soft (Mt. 3:4).

Those that wear soft garments are in king's houses- The Lord is drawing a contrast between John and Herod who imprisoned him. Herod Antipas had minted coins with a reed on them to celebrate the building of Tiberias. Perhaps the Lord is saying: 'OK, so John is weak for the moment, there in prison. But just think of the man he was when he was free, and how in God's eyes he compares so favourably against Herod who imprisoned him'. In His gracious way, the Lord is teaching that the overall sum of a man's spiritual life must be considered, and not whether he ends it with some element of weakness. This approach is also to be found in the way the inspired record appears to comment upon some of the kings of Israel and Judah- weakness at the end didn't necessarily scribble God's overall judgment of their lives.

11:9 *But what did you go out to see?-* Three times in :7-9 the Lord reminds them of their trek out into the wilderness to hear John; His point is that the respect they once had for him should remain, despite his wavering under extreme suffering. God's overall impression of Job appears similar, and it is a good teaching for we who are all too inclined to too harshly judge a good believer for a temporary period of weakness. The Greek phrase 'go out to see…' is used in classical Greek about going out to a spectacle or show. The Lord is suggesting that perhaps that was all their interest in John might have been, just as today likewise, it's quite possible to visit the truest church and hear the truest teaching, yet unperceived by those who are merely 'going to church'.

To see a prophet? Yes! And I say to you, much more than a prophet!- The idea is 'the greatest prophet'. Judaism had various theories about who

had been the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. The Lord was saying that actually, the greatest of them was that man who was now sitting in the grim prison cell in Machaerus Fort, having a crisis of faith and understanding.

11:10 *This is he*- The emphasis is on the word "is". He *was* the prophet who came to herald Messiah. And yet John had denied that he was Elijah, nor "that prophet" (Jn. 1:20), surely a reference to the Elijah prophet; even though he later stated that he had been 'sent before' Messiah (Jn. 3:28), and was the voice of the Isaiah 40 prophet crying in the wilderness (Jn. 1:23). The Lord is saying 'Actually, John *was* that prophet. He initially denied it in his humility, but he really was and is "that prophet". Now again his humility has led him to self-denial, he's wondering whether in fact I am the Elijah prophet and the Messiah Himself is yet to be 'looked for'. But take it on My authority- he really was the Elijah prophet, even though his humility leads him to self-doubt at times'. See on :14 *this is Elijah*.

Of whom it is written: Listen- AV "Behold". An invitation to perceive, and the Lord was asking them to perceive in that imprisoned man a great prophet, to see beyond his temporary, surface-level crisis of John, to perceive that "this *is* he".

I send my messenger before your face; he shall prepare your way before you- The pronouns are somewhat different from the original in Mal. 3:1: "Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before [My face] ... says Yahweh of Armies". Jesus, as the face and presence of God to men, interpreted the words of His Father as being spoken personally to Him. The way was prepared before God's face, according to Malachi, but God's Son applies that to Himself. That is not to say that Jesus was God in any Trinitarian sense. He was the supreme manifestation of God, and He quotes Malachi 3 in such a way as to teach that to those with ears to hear. We have a window here onto how the Lord Jesus read Scripture; passages about His Father were applied by Him to Himself, but that is no claim by Him to be God Himself in person.

The Lord is reminding the crowds who had gone out to hear John in the wilderness that *they* were the way which John had tried to prepare, and He was now the face of Yahweh standing before them. But they had become side-tracked from the essence of personal transformation by a worry about the credibility and humanity of the messenger; and again, this is a principle which badly needs our attention in our own path. So often believers leave the path, the way prepared, because of the perceived weakness or plain humanity of the one who taught them.

The Hebrew text being quoted in Mal. 3:1 has a word play here. "Prepare" translates *panah*, meaning to turn the face (s.w. Gen. 18:22 where the

Angels "turned their faces"), and "Before [your face]" translates *paniym*. The idea is that the messenger would turn the faces of people towards the face of God. The height of the calling was hard for Jewish minds, indeed for any human mind, to take on board; that the God whose face even Moses could not see can be seen face to face, thanks to the work of John the "messenger" turning men's faces to the face of Christ, who is the image of God. No wonder the people so easily became distracted from the height and wonder of the invitation, by focusing upon the fact that a depressed and humble prophet awaiting death in a dark prison cell had some crisis of Biblical interpretation. And so, so often the wonder of our calling likewise is eagerly forgotten by us and eclipsed by petty gossip and speculation about the faith and possible spiritual status of another man.

11:11- see on 20:11.
Truly I say to you, among those that are born of women- The Lord Jesus was Himself the greatest of all born of women (Gal. 4:4), but in His humility He adds no rider to the effect 'John was the greatest of all born of women, Myself excepted, of course'. How we love Him for His humility.

There has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Yet he that is the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he- The little ones were the disciples, according to what the Lord had recently said in Mt. 10:42 (s.w.). He was urging them, yet again, to see their exalted status and to get over Judaism's attitude that the prophets were icons to whom the rank and file of God's people should never pretend. The Lord is using hyperbole here to make the point- that His immature 'little ones' were going to be far greater than even John, the greatest prophet. Or He could be implying that there will be some element of rank in God's future Kingdom- ruling over different numbers of cities, one star differing from another in glory. And the least in that age will be far greater than John was *in this life*. And yet Jesus was proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom in the sense of the breaking in of God's principles in the lives of men. He could mean that John was the greatest under the old system, but the least of those within the new system were greater than John. Oscar Cullmann made a case for translating *mikroteros* here as "the youngest", with reference to the Lord being younger than John the Baptist and yet greater than him (see Jn. 3:30).

Note the present tense in "is greater". The following verse speaks of preaching the Gospel of that Kingdom (Mt.11:12 cp. Lk.16:16), perhaps implying that by responding to Christ's Gospel of the Kingdom we are associated with the Kingdom, and are thereby "greater" than the message which John preached.

Luke adds: "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized by him" (Lk. 7:30). God will fulfil His purpose for us- if we align ourselves with it, and thus see in

everything that happens in our lives *His* will being forwarded. We can choose to not align ourselves with His will. The Pharisees rejected the purpose of God against themselves by not being baptized by John (Lk. 7:30 ESV). His will is not that we should sit around doing Sudoku, watching movies, bantering on the internet, trying to get as much money as possible to finance our nice meals, expensive coffees and designer clothes. His will, as expressed in His very Name, is that He 'will be' grace, love, care, justice, salvation, righteousness, all over the world and to every man and woman. If these things are our focus, our mission, our purpose, our passion, our underlying heartthrob, if *His* will is behind *our* will… then everything somehow comes together for us in a dynamic and fulfilling existence, both in this world and in the life eternal.

11:12 *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and men of violence take it by force*- This can be seen as constructing a parable from the idea of Roman storm troopers taking a city. And those men, the Lord teaches in his attention grabbing manner, really represent every believer who responds to the Gospel of the Kingdom and strives to enter that Kingdom. The same word translated 'take by force' is used by the Lord in Lk. 16:16: "The Kingdom of God is preached, and every man *presses into* it"; true response to the Gospel of the Kingdom is a struggle. Entering the Kingdom is a fight (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). We either violently snatch / take the Kingdom by force (Mt. 11:12), or the devil of our own nature will snatch us away (s.w. Mt. 13:19; Jn. 10:12). The choice before us is that pointed: fight or fall. The Lord graciously and generously saw the zeal of the mixed up, uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going. The cause of the Kingdom must be forcefully advanced by "violent men". This was the sort of language the Lord used. He wasn't preaching anything tame, painless membership of a comfortable community. The Lord saw the zeal of the uncertain, misunderstanding disciples as storm troopers taking the city of the Kingdom of God by force- knowing exactly where they were coming from and where they were going.

However, there are other alternatives in interpretation. It's been suggested that 'the violent ones' may have been a term used to describe Jesus and His followers by His opponents; in which case the Lord would be alluding to this and saying that the enthusiasm of His people was in spiritual and not physical terms. Another option would be that the Lord is alluding to the Zealots and other groups who were trying to bring the Kingdom of God about by political, violent action; and the Lord would then be lamenting that since John's time, there were men who had misunderstood his message of the Kingdom by trying to bring it about by force. And there is a telling double meaning in the Greek for 'take it by

force'; it could also mean that the Kingdom is under attack by these violent men. In this case, the real meaning and progress of the Kingdom as God intended, in terms of His spiritual dominion in human life, was being hindered by those who were trying to establish it by force. This suggestion is re-enforced by the use of the same word in Jn. 6:15, where the mistaken multitudes wanted to 'take [Christ] by force' and make Him King there and then. And this would explain the context- the imprisonment of John by the violent Herod would then be the basis for this saying. The violent were attacking and taking by force the Kingdom preachers like John.

11:13 *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John*- The sentence begins with "For…". This is an explanation of the cut-off point between the time of the Kingdom, and the period of the law and prophets. It was as if their work was being done up until John. The *law* prophesied until John in the sense that in the Messiah whom John proclaimed, the law's prophecies were fulfilled. Note that the law just as much as the prophets is to be seen as prophesying. And yet other changeover points or boundaries are suggested within the New Testament. The law would 'pass' when all was fulfilled, which seems to hint at the 'finishing' of all when the Lord cried "It is finished!" on the cross. The law would not pass *until* this point (Mt. 5:18, using the same word as in 11:13 "until"). The Lord's death was clearly a major ending point for the old system. And yet Heb. 8:13 speaks of the old system as decaying and becoming old, and being about to vanish away- surely in the destruction of the temple in AD70. There are other hints in the NT that the old system somehow operated with some level of acceptance from God until AD70. Why the different potential changeover points? Presumably because the hope and intention was that John would successfully prepare the way, and the Messianic reign would be ushered in by Israel's acceptance of their Messiah. And yet they killed Him. That point in itself was the theological changeover moment. But still not all Israel accepted the apostolic preaching of repentance for the crucifixion. And so in practice, the changeover point came when the temple was destroyed and any serious obedience to the old covenant was thereby rendered impossible. In all this we see God's amazing grace and desire continually to work with people, factoring in the possibility of their repentance.

11:14- see on 21:32.
And if you are willing to receive it- The same word was used earlier in this section, when the Lord spoke of the apostles being 'received' by those who had initially responded to John's teaching (Mt. 10:14,40,41). If Israel would receive it, John the Baptist was the Elijah prophet. The course of fulfilment of prophecy was conditional upon whether John succeeded in turning the hearts of Israel back to the fathers or not; on preparing them

for the great and terrible day of the Lord. The Kingdom *could* have come in the 1st century had Israel received John as Elijah. But they would not. And so another Elijah prophet is to come in the last days and prepare Israel for her Messiah. "If ye are willing to receive him, this is Elijah which is to come" (RVmg.) says it all. The Elijah prophet who was to herald the Messianic Kingdom *could have been* John the Baptist- if Israel had received him. But they didn't, and so the prophecy went down another avenue of fulfilment. It could be that Mal. 4:6 implies that there is still the possibility that even the latter day Elijah ministry may not be totally successful- for the earth / land is to be smitten with a curse unless he succeeds in turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and there is no lack of evidence that the land may well be 'smitten' in the last days.

Some prophecies are fulfilled according to the acceptance of their fulfilment by believers, and therefore have their fulfilments in different ways at different times. Thus for those who received it, Malachi's 'Elijah' prophecies were fulfilled in John the Baptist, for those who accepted him (Mt. 11:14). The implication is that for those who didn't, those prophecies weren't fulfilled. When the Lord stood up and read from Isaiah, He commented that "this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Lk. 4:21). He didn't mean that His reading those words in a synagogue had fulfilled them. He speaks of "your ears" as standing for 'your correct perception / understanding' in Mt. 13:16. What He was surely saying was that for those of them who perceived who He was, Isaiah's words were ringing true. For those who rejected Him, of course, they weren't fulfilled, and therefore their complete, universal acceptance / fulfilment would be delayed until a future day; just as it was with the 'Elijah' prophecy.

The "it" in "receive it" could refer to the prophetic message of the Law and prophets- hence GNB offers "and if you are willing to believe their message…". It was taken as assumed that every Jew received / accepted the Law and the prophets, but the Lord's point was that if they really received it, then they would accept John's message and now accept Him as Messiah. Likewise the Lord challenges the Jewish scribes as to whether they had ever really read the Old Testament (Mt. 21:16,42; Mk. 2:25)- when they spent their days doing so (Jn. 5:39 RV).

This was Elijah that has to come- See on :10. John in humility and self-effacement had denied being the Elijah prophet (Jn. 1:20), and he now had a similar doubt, wondering whether in fact Jesus was the Elijah prophet and the Messiah was still to be looked for. The Lord is saying that John was who he was, the Elijah prophet, despite John's self-doubt. And we again have an example- we are to treat our brethren as whom God sees them as being, notwithstanding their temporary weaknesses and

self-doubt. The use of "this" rather than "he" could be because the Lord had in mind the Elijah prophet's ministry, and not just John personally.

11:15 *He that has ears to hear, let him hear*- The Lord often uses this phrase, the idea seems to be that not all have the capacity to really hear, but if we do, then, we still have to exercise a choice as to whether we do or not. That would also be true to observed experience, because that is indeed how it seems- some people have no interest in God's word, something is not 'given' them, so that they never 'get it'; and those to whom it is given, there must still be a conscious choice exercised. For those who decide rightly, it becomes true that to him who has, more is given (Mt. 13:12). That verse in 13:12 begs the question 'Has what?'. The answer is surely given here in 11:15: 'ears to hear'. The hearing or listening which the Lord refers to is listening to the message of John- for the next verses liken John's ministry to calling out to people to respond, although most choose to be non-responsive. Maybe the idea is 'Despite John having a temporary crisis of faith and understanding, that is no excuse for not hearing his message'. Perhaps the tension is being developed between the need to *hear* John, whereas it is thrice stressed that this crowd had gone out into the desert to *see* John (11:7-9), as if they were going to a show- a powerful challenge that echoes down to our generation of churchgoing and churchianity.

11:16 *But unto what shall I liken this generation?*- The Lord several times spoke of that entire generation as sinful and unresponsive to the Gospel. Yet the context here is talking of John the Baptist's work. This therefore was a tacit recognition that John's ministry had been unsuccessful in terms of converting all Israel, and therefore clearly there was to be a change in the prophetic program. As noted earlier in commentary on this chapter, it was this change in the prophetic program which was worrying John, even though unnecessarily in terms of his own salvation.

It is like children sitting- John's ministry was like children wanting to play funerals, and taking the initiative by beginning with mock weeping- but not getting any response. The Lord's ministry was as children wanting to play weddings, piping to the other children, who would not respond by dancing. Note that in 10:42 the Lord has likened His preachers to little children. Children were considered non-persons in society, and yet the Lord uses children in this parable as representative of His preachers. We note that although He likened them to children, He had to sternly warn them that they still needed to be converted and become *as* children (Mt. 18:3). We see Him so often imputing status to His followers which they had not in reality attained. This is to help us appreciate how He can impute righteousness to we who are not righteous. The parable of preaching here pictures children appealing to children. The commonality

between us and our audience is very attractive and persuasive. We are humans reaching out to humans, indeed, children to children; the children called out (cp. calling out the Gospel) to "their *fellows*".

In the market places, who call to their fellows- The town square. The Lord uses the same word in the parable of Mt. 20:3, where the call of the Gospel comes to men who are standing idle in the market place (s.w.). The picture is perhaps of society getting on with its existence, but the weak labourers and the children being left to one side, excluded from standard adult social and economic life. And it is to these that the call of the Gospel comes, in the midst of human busyness.

11:17 *And say: We piped to you and you did not dance. We wailed and you did not mourn*- The Old Testament as well as the New is written in such a way as to encourage memorization, although this is often masked by the translation. There are several devices commonly used to assist in this. Not least is alliteration, i.e. similarly sounding syllables. "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced (*orchee-sasthe*); we have mourned unto you and ye have not lamented (*ekop-sasthe*)" (Mt. 11:17) could be dynamically rendered: 'We piped for you, and you never **stept**; we dirged for you, and you never **wept**". We note that the Lord parallels the work of the children John's 'children' or disciples, and His. Although both of them were somewhat negative about each other, the Lord saw both groups of children as doing the same work, despite a different culture and even doctrinal emphasis. The division in the town square was between the children begging the others to respond, and the children of this world who didn't want to, in the midst of those who didn't even have ears to hear and were just getting on with their worldly business and never 'heard' the invitation from either group of children.

The Lord was speaking this whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour. He could say that just as John's preparation of the way had not been responded to on the level of the whole "generation" or society, neither had His more upbeat and joyful invitation been accepted. Note that the call of the Gospel is a call to engage with the preacher, to dance in response to the tune piped. Community and fellowship are all part of response to the Gospel; it's not about delivering truths to an individual who then accepts them and has no further relationship with the preacher. This is why the father-son analogy is used for preaching and conversion later in the NT. There is the implication too that the initial preacher continues to call the tune, to direct the dancing of the convert, even after initial acceptance of the invitation.

Remember that the Lord is addressing those who had gone out to hear

John preach (:7-9). He is implying that they had no actually responded to his call to them.

11:18 *For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say he has a demon*-The Gospels give the impression that there was mass response to John's preaching, but according to the Lord's reasoning here, He felt that "this generation", society as a whole, had rejected John's message and slandered him as in league with demons. Exactly the same was said about the ministry of Jesus (Jn. 8:48 uses the same term about Jesus- "He has a demon"). Surface level interest in the message, even applauding it and making a great effort to go out into the desert to hear it preached, was and is not the same as responding in real repentance.

11:19 *The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, Look, a gluttonous man and a drunkard*- The Lord was accused of being a drunkard, a glutton, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:34). This is all language reminiscent of the commands for the parents to slay the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21:18-21. It's conceivable that one of the reasons why His death was demanded was because of this. Hence His relatives sought to take Him away out of public sight. It's also been claimed that the Jews' complaint that Jesus 'made Himself equal to the Father' (Jn. 5:18) is alluding to a rabbinic expression which speaks of the 'rebellious son' of Dt. 21 as being a son who makes himself equal to his father. The shame of being Jesus' mother eventually wore off upon Mary, or so it seems to me. Just as the shame of standing up for Christian principles can wear us down, too. In passing, note that the prodigal son is likewise cast in the role of the 'rebellious son' who should be killed; the correspondence suggests that the Lord Jesus can identify with sinners like the prodigal because He was treated *as if* He were a sinner, a rebellious son; even though He was not in actuality.
The criticisms of the Lord here were all related to His drinking, eating and table company. Jesus showed by His fellowship with "the poor in spirit" that He meant what He said. He, as God's Son, extended His Father's fellowship to them in the here and now of this life. Luke seems to have been especially perceptive of the fact that Jesus often accepted invitations to eat with those whom others despised (Lk. 5:29; 7:36; 10:38; 11:37; 14:1). In 1st century Palestine, to eat with someone was a religious act. The host blessed and broke the bread and then broke off a piece for each guest, thus binding together all present. This was why the many sects of Judaism carefully limited their table fellowship (notably the Pharisees and Essenes). Thus it was the Lord's desire to share table fellowship with the very lowest (apparently) within the community of God that brought Him such criticism (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16). His teaching also made it plain that He saw table fellowship with Him at a meal as a type of the future Messianic banquet, to be enjoyed in His Kingdom at His return,

when redeemed sinners will again sit and eat with Him (Lk. 22:29,30). To accept the gift of the bread of life at the breaking of bread is to symbolize our acceptance of the life that is in Him. If we believe what we are doing at the memorial meeting, we are showing our acceptance of the fact that we will be there, and that what we are doing in our humble breakings of bread is in fact a true foretaste of the Kingdom experience which awaits us.

A friend of tax collectors and sinners!- The Lord was 'fond' [*philos*] of sinners; He liked them and their company. In this we see His greatness, for most spiritual people admit to finding the company of the unspiritual somewhat of a burden. But the Lord's spirituality was beyond that. Truly He is the sinners' friend. And Matthew as a tax collector is testifying to this personally.

But wisdom is justified by her children- Appreciating the inter-relation between 'doctrine' and practice will result in our seeing through the fallacy that because someone's deeds are good, therefore it doesn't matter too much about their doctrine. The spiritual fruit which God seeks is that which is brought forth by the seed of His word, the Gospel.
To *really* understand the basic Gospel with one's heart is to bring forth fruit, to be converted. True wisdom is justified by the works she brings forth (Mt. 11:19). This is why true conversion involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). Yet the counter argument would be that there are people who know God's truth who behave poorly, and there are those who know little of it who act well. This is why the Lord speaks of "wisdom", not "truth"; for wisdom is God's truth applied in practice.
On another level, we see here the Lord's response to slander, both of Himself and John. Wisdom is justified of her children- in the end. The "children" are those of Himself and John, who have just featured in His parable of the preachers, His children, meeting lack of response in the town square. Even if there is lack of response to the invitation, the Lord was confident that both His 'children' (the "little ones" of Mt. 10:42) and John's would be the justification of the truth and wisdom which they were teaching. This is all a comfort to those undergoing slander. In the end, if we are on the side of wisdom, we shall be justified.

11:20 *Then he began to chastise the cities*- The Lord also upbraided the disciples for their unbelief (Mk. 16:14 s.w.). Again we see the Lord being positive towards His disciples in the eyes of the world, and yet privately challenging them with the same language of criticism which He had for the unbelieving world. His imputation of righteousness to us doesn't mean He is blind to our weakness.

Wherein most- Gk. 'the majority'. We must give this word its full weight. The majority of the Lord's miracles were done in three tiny villages- Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. We have just learnt that whilst the disciples were away on their preaching tour, He had gone to preach in their home villages (11:1). Perhaps some time had elapsed between verses 19 and 20. He had had little response. Philip, Andrew and Peter were all from Bethsaida, the 'home of fishermen' (Jn. 1:44; 12:21). We sense that the Lord had a specific plan in mind for His preaching work. He made a particular focus upon Galilee and the home villages of His disciples- and Galilee was of course His own home area. We see in this policy a desire by Him for us to witness in our own immediate environment and family situations. Mk. 8:22-26 records the only miracle the Gospels record as performed in Bethsaida, and the Lord told the cured blind man not to tell anyone in Bethsaida about the miracle- presumably because the people there had already seen ample miracles and had not repented.

Of his mighty works had been done, because they had not repented- Here we see the purpose of the healing miracles. They were not simply to alleviate human suffering for the sake of it- they were specifically designed to lead people to repentance. God's goodness is intended to lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). The doing of Christian 'good works' can't be criticized in itself, but it needs to be observed that they often seem to be performed 'for the sake of it', whereas the Lord's works were always within a wider plan and aim of bringing people to spiritual healing.

11:21 *Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have*- God likewise looks down upon our lives today, seeing all possibilities, and how unbelievers would respond so much more to Him than His own dear people. It's the pain of the parent, knowing that other children would respond so much more to their love than their own beloved offspring. The Lord Jesus had something of this when He commented that Tyre and Sidon would've repented had they had His message preached to them; but Israel would not. To know all possible futures must make experiencing human life and poor decision making all the harder and more tragic for the Father and Son.

Repented- Here we see that the intention of the miracles was not merely healing in itself, as a good to humanity- but rather to invite people to repentance. Hence the connection between healing and forgiveness in the account of the healing of the paralyzed man.

Long ago in sackcloth and ashes- Made of camel and goat hair, therefore very similar to the clothing of John the Baptist- which is the context here (11:8).

11:22 *But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you*- Tyre and Sodom were major Gentile cities. The Lord clearly believed their inhabitants would be resurrected and appear at the future day of judgment. Seeing that knowledge is the basis of responsibility to judgment, it follows that there was some witness made to them. Ezekiel's prophecies of condemnation against Tyre can therefore be seen as conditional prophecies, like the prophecy of Nineveh's destruction- they could have repented in response to them. The witness to Sodom was presumably through the witness of Lot's righteous life. The extent of human responsibility to Divine judgment would appear to be far greater than we might suspect. Those who live in the presence of believers are surely responsible to judgment, according to the pattern of Sodom. Clearly there will be degrees of punishment at that day- and for the home villages of the disciples, their suffering will be 'intolerable'. The implication is that if the witness of Ezekiel, Lot etc. had been backed up by the kind of miracles the Lord was performing, then this would've tipped the balance- and they would've repented.

11:23 *And you Capernaum, shall you be exalted to heaven?* - Here we have another example of the Bible being written from the perspective of men. Capernaum was exalted in her own eyes, the people there were spiritually proud and exalted in their own eyes. Likewise "the wise" in :25 refers to those who thought they were wise.

You shall go down to hades- The prophecy against Babylon of Isaiah 14 is here applied to the towns of Israel. The point is that the condemnation of the wicked Gentiles will come upon those of God's people who act like them. Likewise the punishment of Babylon was to be cast as a millstone into the sea, but this is applied by the Lord to those of God's people who make their brethren stumble (Mt. 18:6; Rev. 18:21).

For if the mighty works- The Greek *dunamis* also has the sense of ability, possible power. The miracles, to which the "mighty works" clearly refer, had potential power to bring the people to repentance, but they were content to just accept the temporal blessings of knowing Jesus rather than being moved by those blessings to repentance.

Had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would

have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes- The Lord knew that cities like Tyre and Sidon would have responded to the Gospel in the first century; had it been preached to them. But the message was taken to Jewish villages like Chorazin and Bethsaida instead. Such was God's love, His especial and exclusive love for Israel. Sodom likewise would have repented if the message of Lot had been backed up by miracles; but, that extra proof wasn't given. But such a concession was made to Israel through the ministry and miracles of Jesus.

11:24 *But I say to you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you*- The Greek for "tolerable" could suggest 'endurance', hinting at a period of suffering rather than an eternal state of suffering. The suffering will be the sense of regret for what could have been, how they could have responded. This sense will be so acute that it is described in figurative terms as Gehenna fire, gnashing of teeth etc. Time and again we must remind ourselves of this, so that day by day we 'grasp the moment' and proceed in life with no ultimate cause for spiritual regret.

11:25 *At that time Jesus answered*- Often the Gospels record that Jesus "answered and said...". Yet it's often not clear whether anyone had asked a question, or said anything that needed a response (Mt. 11:25; 22:1; Mk. 10:24, 51; 11:14,22,33; 12:35; 13:2; 14:48; Lk. 5:22; 7:40; 8:50; 13:2; 14:3,5; 17:17; 22:51; Jn. 1:50; 5:19; 6:70; 10:32; 12:23,30; 16:31). If you go through this list, you will see how Jesus 'answered' / responded to peoples' unexpressed fears and questions, their unarticulated concerns, criticisms, feelings and agendas. This little phrase reveals how sensitive Jesus was. He saw people's unspoken, unarticulated needs and responded. He didn't wait to be asked. For Jesus, everybody He met was a question, a personal direct challenge, that He responded to. And of course this is how we should seek to be too. And yet here in Mt. 11:25 He could be responding to His own question and reflection upon why so few responded and why only the immature disciples seemed to understand anything at all? We see here a window into the very internal thought process of the Lord, something which could only come from a Divinely inspired record.

I thank You O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth- This is language taken directly from the *Hodayot*, the Qumran "Thanksgiving Psalms". There is reason to think that in his years in the Qumran area, John the Baptist became familiar with the Qumran community, and may have passed on some of their style and culture to his converts. The multitudes addressed here by the Lord had initially responded to John (11:7). So it would seem that the Lord is bridge building with them, speaking to them in terms

known and accessible to them, and yet leading them further and away from the legalism and extremes of Qumran thought. Note how there is a juxtaposition of God's Almightiness, as Lord of Heaven and earth, with His closeness to us as "Father".

That You did hide these things from the wise- Those who think they are wise in their own eyes- see on "exalted" in :24.

And prudent- Again we see the Lord's grace, for the disciples themselves weren't 'understanding' (s.w.) of everything at this time (s.w. Mt. 13:51; Mk. 6:52 they considered / understood not; 8:17,21; Lk. 18:34; 24:45). Yet to them was revealed the Truth which others had hid from them.

And did reveal them to- This continues the thought of 11:15, that only some have ears to hear. The word is used in Mt. 16:27 of how the truth of Christ was revealed to Peter, one of the "babes".

Babes- An essay in the serious immaturity of the disciples, and yet the Lord's love of them all the same. They are the 'little ones' of 10:42, the little children in the town square of 11:16. See on 1 Cor. 1:19. Paul saw the simplicity of the Corinthian believers as the sort of thing Christ referred to in Mt. 11:25.

11:26 *Yes Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Your sight*- We have the same kind of thing in Revelation, where Angels as it were take a breath and praise the Father for His wisdom in the judgments which they have just executed. We have here one of the few times when we get the record of the Lord's actual words to God in prayer. We note that He repeatedly addresses Him as "Father"; and through receipt of the Spirit, His relationship with the Father becomes ours. And "Father" ought surely to be our most common form of address to God.

11:27 *All things have been delivered to me by my Father*- Gk. 'were delivered'. The "all things" may be the power of salvation for all men.

And no one knows the Son save the Father. Neither does anyone know the Father- Gk. 'to know fully'. Nobody, the disciples included, to whom the Father had 'revealed' repentance, fully knew the Son nor the Father. There is a parallel to be observed here between 'knowing the Father' and repenting; for the context speaks of how the majority had not repented despite the Lord's miracles. The little ones, the babes, the disciples, had repented- but this had been 'revealed' to them by the Father (:25). Now, the Lord speaks of how the Son 'reveals' the Father. The life of repentance is the life of knowing the Father. To know God is to know our

sinfulness and repent. And this is the "rest" from sin which the Lord speaks of in :28.

Save the Son- Whether or not Joseph died or left Mary by the time Jesus hit adolescence, the fact was that Joseph wasn't His real father. He was effectively fatherless in the earthly sense. As such, this would have set Him up in certain psychological matrices which had their effect on His personality. He could speak of His Heavenly Father in the shockingly unprecedented form of 'abba', daddy. He grew so close to His Heavenly Father because of the lack of an earthly one, and the inevitable stresses which there would have been between Him and Joseph. A strong, fatherly-type figure is a recurrent feature of the Lord's parables; clearly He was very focused upon His Heavenly Father. He could say with passionate truth: "No one knows a son except a father, and no one knows a father except a son" (Mt. 11:27; Lk. 10:22).

And to whomsoever- The idea is not that the Lord Jesus had a list of humanity and chose a few from that list. He has earlier spoken of the freedom of choice to 'receive' (:14) God's message, and He was urging all men to do so. Although all men are potentially delivered to Him, the Father is revealing Himself to only some of them. The Father is revealed in the Son, as John's Gospel makes clear. It's not that some people are chosen by the Son to have this revelation; rather is it a statement of fact, or method- the knowledge of the Father is through the Son revealing Him. And this is why He goes straight on in :28 to urge people to come to Him. The ideas of coming to Him and 'whomsoever', anyone, are very much the language of John's Gospel and the Revelation, which concludes with an appeal to 'whosoever will' to 'come' to Christ and salvation.

The Son wishes to reveal Him- This revealing is by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:5). It was not flesh and blood that revealed the Lord to Peter (16:17). As noted on 1 Pet. 1:21, relationship with God is predicated upon relationship with the Son; He is the only way to the Father. Academic Bible study, consideration of the apparent evidence of apologetics, will not reveal God as Father to men. It is the Son who reveals Him. If we take the jump of faith in accepting Him, only then will He reveal the Father to us.

11:28 *Come to me all you that labour and are*- See on :27 "whomsoever". The Lord may be urging the audience to come unto *Him* in the same way as they had come out to hear John preaching (:7-9). The invitation at the last day to "Come" into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34 s.w.) is heard even now in the invitation to come after Him. The preceding verses share with us a beautiful insight into the mind and inner prayer of the Son to the Father. He meditated upon why apparently so few were responding, and went on to marvel at the Father's wisdom in revealing only to some, and to the

immature ‘little ones’ of His disciples. But arising out of that time of prayer and meditation, the Lord goes on to make a public appeal to whosoever will to come to Him. And this is the exact pattern which our public witness and appeal to others should follow.

Heavy laden- The context is a lament that because people are wise, prudent and exalted in pride, they will not come to the Father and Son. But this way of life and thinking is in fact a hard way to live. Hence the Lord commends His own humility to those proud people. Whilst the arrogance and self-assurance of modern man seems an impossible barrier to the Gospel, we must be aware that actually they are struggling with it and are laden down with it. The word is only elsewhere used about the lawyers lading people with heavy burdens (Lk. 11:46)- not only of guilt, but also of pride in having kept irrelevant laws. David found his sins associated with Bathsheba "as an heavy burden... too heavy for me... I am (thereby) bowed down greatly" (Ps. 32:4,6). Surely our Lord was thinking back to David when he invited all of us: "Come unto me, all you who labour and are heavy laden (with sins), and I will give you rest... for My... burden is light" (Mt. 11:28-30).

And I will give you rest- The Lord Jesus invites those who follow Him to accept the “rest” which He gives (Mt. 11:28). He uses a Greek word which is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for the Sabbath rest. Jesus was offering a life of Sabbath, of rest from trust in our own works (cp. Heb. 4:3,10). We shouldn’t, therefore, keep a Sabbath one day per week, but rather live our whole lives in the spirit of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were the ones burdening the people (Mt. 23:4; Lk. 11:46), so this could be read as a fairly direct appeal to quit respecting the religious leaders of the day and follow the teaching of Jesus instead. Legalism and obedience to the Law is likened to an unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1).

11:29 *Take*- The same word is used in the challenge to "take up" the cross. To take up Christ's cross, to take on His yoke, is to learn of Him, to come to know Him. Yet do we sense any *pain* in our coming to know Christ? We should do, because the cross was the ultimate symbol of pain, and to take it up is to take on the yoke, the knowledge, of Christ. Clearly the knowledge of the Father and Son is so much more than knowing theological propositions about them.

My yoke- The yoke metaphor was commonly used at the time to speak of a career or profession / daily occupation. Our 'career' is to be in His

service, and any human yoke or career is to not be seen by us as our defining situation in life. We can't be 'career people' in the sense that many are in this world- for our career is with the Lord. And yet the yoke was also understood as 'teaching'; for Sirach 51:26 has the sage inviting students to put their necks under his yoke and learn his teaching. The Lord Jesus is a yoke- He unites men together, so that the otherwise unbearable burden of the spiritual life is lighter (Mt. 11:29). If we do not let our fellowship with others lighten our load, then we basically have not been brought under Christ. To be in Him, under His yoke, is to put our arms around our brethren and labour together. The Lord paralleled "Come unto *Me*" with taking His yoke upon us, in order to have a light burden (Mt. 11:28-30). A yoke is what binds animals together, so that they can between them carry a burden which otherwise would be too great for them individually. The invitation to come unto Jesus personally is therefore an invitation into a community- to be lined up alongside another, and have a yoke placed upon us. Without submitting to this, we can't actually carry the heavy burden laid upon us. This heavy burden laid upon the believer must surely have some reference to the cross we are asked to share in and carry. We can't do this alone; and perhaps it happened that the Lord Himself couldn't even bear His own cross without the help of another, in order to show us the point. We can't claim to have come personally unto Jesus, somehow liking the idea of the Man Jesus, intellectually accepting His teachings on an abstract level- and yet keep our distance from our brethren. It seems increasingly true that human relationships are almost impossible to maintain at an intimate level- without Christ. He is the yoke which enables the psychological miracle of people pulling together, for life, in order to carry His cross. The most essential "law of Christ" is to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Paul had this in mind when he described his brethren as 'yokefellows' (Phil. 4:3). For Paul, his joy and crown would be to see his brethren accepted into God's Kingdom at judgment day. David had the same spirit when he wrote of how he longed to "see the prosperity of Your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance" (Ps. 106:5). His personal vision of God's Kingdom involved seeing others there; there's no hint of spiritual selfishness in David. And he goes straight on to comment: "We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity... our fathers understood not..." (Ps. 106:6). David felt himself very much at one with the community of God's children, both in their failures and in their ultimate hope. Life with God simply can't be lived in isolation from the rest of His people. Our salvation in that sense has a collective aspect to it, and if we want 'out' with the community of believers in this life, then we're really voting ourselves out of their future glory.

The reference to having a heavy yoke lifted recalls the servant song which spoke of the need to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6).

Paul takes passages from Isaiah's servant songs and applies them to us. The servant who suffered and witnessed to the world was evidently the Lord Jesus. And yet Isaiah is also explicit that the servant is the whole seed of Abraham, "Jacob", the slowly-developing people of God (Is. 41:8; 44:1). There are many connections within Isaiah between the servant songs, and the descriptions of the people of Israel into which the songs are interspersed. The Saviour-servant was to bring out the prisoners from the dungeons (Is. 42:7), so was every Israelite "to let the oppressed go free... loose the bonds", and to "undo the bands of the [heavy] yoke" (Is. 58:6) as Christ does here (Mt. 11:28,29); His work of deliverance is to be replicated by each of us in our witness. Whoever is in Him will by this very fact follow Him in this work. In Isaiah's first context, the suffering servant was King Hezekiah. Yet all Israel were to see themselves as 'in' him, as spiritual Israel are to see themselves as in Christ. "He was oppressed", as Israel at that time were being "oppressed" by Assyria. As they were covered in wounds and spiritual sickness (Is. 1:5,6), so the suffering servant bore their diseases and rose again in salvation victory. Significantly, Isaiah 40-53 speak of the one servant, whereas Isaiah 54-66 speak of the "servants" who fulfil in principle the work of the singular servant. When the Lord speaks of a change of yokes for the weary and a granting of rest in Him (Mt. 11:28-30), He is using terms taken from Isaiah's restoration prophecies. The offer of rest was rejected by the exiles then; but is taken up now by all who accept Christ, realizing that they are in the same state as the exiles in Babylon.

And learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart- Vine comments: "The word for the Christian virtue of humility was not used before the Christian era, and is distinctly an outgrowth of the Gospel". To be able to say in genuine humility that one knows the state of their own heart, and that it is humble, is an essay not only in humility but in the acute self-knowledge of the Lord. The Greek translated "lowly" definitely means cast down, depressed, implying a bringing down from a superior position (s.w. 2 Cor. 7:6). This helps us understand the language of Phil. 2:5-11, which speaks of the progressive humiliation of Christ, culminating in the death of the cross. Even at this point in His ministry, the Lord felt that He had been brought down in mind- He felt the progressive nature of His humility. And in that passage, the appeal is to allow that kind of mind and process to be in us, which was in Christ.

And you shall find- The yoke is *given* but we still have to *find* it by accepting the potential enabled by the Lord.

Rest for your souls- He assures us that if we come to Him, we will find "rest" (Mt. 11:29); but the same word is only used elsewhere about

the rest / comfort which our brethren give us (1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; Philemon 7,20).

11:30- see Ex. 2:11.
For my yoke is easy- A poor translation. The cross of Christ is anything but "easy"; the idea is more that it is helpful for service; the relationships He enables between believers is what makes it easier for us to carry the heavy loads of His service, i.e. the cross. Even if we still insist on the translation "easy", we reflect that the way to the Kingdom is easy relative to the wonder of what is in store for the faithful (2 Cor. 4:17); and yet from our human perspective it is hard indeed, a life of self-crucifixion (Acts 14:22; Rev.7:14). "Easy" translates *chrestos*, which sounds very like the 'Christ'. By this word play the point is being made that Christ *is* His yoke. One of the most essential things about Christ is that those in Him are bound together with each other. Any view of 'Christ' which excludes those in Him is therefore fundamentally flawed. Paul therefore teaches avoidance of any who cause division contrary to the teaching of Christ which we have "learned"- using the same word used here about Christ's uniting yoke being 'learning' of Him (Rom. 16:17). See on 20:16.

And my burden is light- Mic. 2:3 reminded Israel that they will be under the yoke of judgment if they reject Yahweh's yoke. The Lord spoke of His servants having a light yoke. The Bible minded among His hearers would have thought back to the threatened punishment of an iron yoke for the disobedient (Dt. 28:48). 'It's a yoke either way', they would have concluded. But the Lord's yoke *even in this life* is light, and has promise of the life which is to come! The logic of taking it, with the restrictions it inevitably implies (for it is a yoke), is simply overpowering. Note that the Greek for 'light' essentially means 'able to be carried'- which connects with the idea of 'taking up' the yoke and cross (see on 11:29). The point is- it is doable. The cross can be carried, the yoke can be worn- if we learn of Christ and thereby learn to take our place with others in carrying it.

CHAPTER 12

12:1 *At that time, on the Sabbath day, Jesus went through the grainfields, and his disciples were hungry*- The very poor were allowed to do this by the Law (Lev. 19:9; Dt. 23:24,25), and so we see in this a picture of the deep poverty of the Lord's followers; He later parallels the urgent hunger of David's men at the time of 1 Sam. 21 with that of His followers. It would seem that He Himself did not make use of the concession, because the criticism was focused upon His disciples rather than Himself. W.D. Davies lists evidence that Judaism forbad fasting on the Sabbath (Jubilees 50:12) (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 312 (*op cit.*)). In this case, the record is showing how the legalism of the time would've condemned the disciples- and the poor generally- either way: for fasting on the Sabbath, or for 'threshing' on the Sabbath to get food so as not to fast. The Lord therefore takes the whole argument to a level far above such petty legalism.

And began to pluck ears of grain to eat- The only point in mentioning this would presumably be because the Pharisees came and stopped them. This shows how closely the Lord and His men were under the critical eyes of others, even from a distance.

12:2 *But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him: Look, your disciples do what is unlawful on the Sabbath*- A constant concern with the Pharisees (Mt. 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Jn. 5:10; 18:31). The Lord's attitude here was to show that the Old Testament itself envisaged situations where true spirituality was above law. The parable of Mt. 20:15 brings the point home- the generous employer justified his pouring out of grace, giving the weak and lazy the same penny a day as the hard workers, on the basis that 'It is lawful for me to do what I wish'.

12:3 *But he said to them: Have you not read*- Of course they had, many times. But the Lord here and several times elsewhere challenges them (and us) as to whether we have really read what we have. The Lord could have legitimately answered them: 'It is lawful to pick corn whilst passing through a field, the Law allows for this if one is poor, and my followers are indeed poor. There is nothing in the Law which stipulates this permission doesn't operate on the Sabbath'. But as always, the Lord was prepared to meet people where they were, and to take them to a higher level. He seeks to teach by general principle that the extent of His Lordship meant that He and His men were free to do as they pleased on this kind of matter. He reasoned that 'OK, let's assume you're right, but David and *his* men broke the law because they were about God's business, this over-rode the need for technical obedience'. The Lord Jesus wasn't constantly correcting specific errors of interpretation. He dealt in principles much larger than this, in order to make a more essential, practical, useful point.

What David did when he was hungry, and they that were with him- The Lord's reasoning depends upon drawing a parallel between Himself and David, and David's warriors and the disciples. Again, He is encouraging them to see themselves as no less than the warriors of David who later became the governors of Israel. Aaron's sons were the ones who were intended to eat the showbread (Lev. 24:5-9)- and again the Lord is inviting His secular disciples to see themselves as a new priesthood.

12:4 *How he entered into the house of God*- For non-Levites to enter the Sanctuary was also not 'lawful', quite apart from eating the bread which only the priests could lawfully eat. This prepares the way for the Lord's later parable about God urging unclean street people to 'enter [His] house' because Israel had rejected the invitation (the same words are used- Lk. 14:23). The psychological magnitude of the Lord's new system of thinking is hard to appreciate. Non-Levites could now enter it- and even the worst of the Gentiles. But the magnitude of the new thinking in Christ for anyone, not least secular people of the 21st Century, is no less.

And ate the showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests?
- The Lord defended the non-observant Judaism of the twelve as being due to their joy that He, the bridegroom, was with them (Lk. 5:33,34). When they 'ground corn' on the Sabbath, the Lord defended them to their critics by saying that they were like David's men eating the showbread. Those guys were just walking through a cornfield rubbing ears together as their manner was, as they had done on many a Sabbath day, but not realizing that this time there was some Scribe out with his binocular vision scrutinizing them. They surely weren't doing it because their minds were on the incident of David's men eating the showbread. The Lord had asked them to obey the Scribes, who sat in Moses' seat, over this kind of trivia. But He doesn't rebuke them. Rather, He defends them to others, imputing far more spiritual perception to them than they had (Lk. 6:1-4).

Clearly the Lord is suggesting that His ragtag crowd of disciples and questionable ministering women were the new priesthood of a new Israel.

12:5 *Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day*- We need to reflect upon the implications of the fact that the vast majority of the early Christians were illiterate. Literacy levels in first century Palestine were only 10% at the highest estimate. Some estimate that the literacy level in the Roman empire was a maximum of 10%, and literacy levels in Palestine were at most 3%. Most of the literate people in Palestine would have been either the wealthy or the Jewish scribes. And yet it was to the poor that the Gospel was preached, and even in Corinth there were not many educated or "mighty" in this world within the ecclesia. Notice how the Lord said to the Pharisees: "Have you not *read*?" (Mk. 2:25; Mt. 12:5; 19:4), whilst He says to those who responded to Him: "You have *heard*"

(Mt. 5:21,27,33). His followers were largely the illiterate. As the ecclesial world developed, Paul wrote inspired letters to the ecclesias. Those letters would have been *read* to the brethren and sisters. Hence the great importance of 'teachers' in the early churches, those who could faithfully read and transmit to others what had been written.

The priests in the temple- The rabbis taught that "Temple service takes precedence over the Sabbath" (W.D. Davies *Matthew* p. 313 (*op cit.*)). Thinking through the logic of the Lord's argument, He clearly has the view that His disciples are about the work of the temple, walking through that cornfield. Otherwise His appeal to the rabbinic dictum had no sense. Again, He is encouraging His followers to see themselves as far more than secular, not very spiritual people who are personally attracted to the teachings of Jesus and are awed by His miracles. He's saying that actually they are as priests, professionally committed to serving God actively.

Profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?- The Lord (Mt. 12:5) said that the priests "profaned" or 'desecrated' the Sabbath; He didn't say that because they kept the spirit of it, that was OK. By using a word as extreme as "profaned" He seems to be even emphasizing the point of paradox within God's self-revelation.

Having accepted the Bible as the source of authority, we find that the Bible does not categorically list what behaviour is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Even within the Law of Moses, to obey some commands meant breaking others. And it is a common dilemma of sincere believers that they find themselves having to break one principle to keep another. The Bible is written in such a way as to give clear instruction to those who love and respect it, and yet to confuse those who do not fundamentally accept it into thinking that their faulty understanding is in fact the will of God. This is why it is true, on a surface level, that you can prove what you like from the Bible. Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones, David Koresh *et al* all managed to 'prove' the most bizarre things from the Bible- and persuade others to genuinely think that to do evil was in fact doing righteousness. So the fact that someone thinks that they are correctly interpreting the Bible does not thereby justify them, however sincere their conscience may be. And it does not mean that the church must therefore accept them, just because their conscience is clear and they think the Bible justifies their behaviour. The opposite of love isn't so much hatred, as indifference. To be indifferent to the real welfare of our fellows in this world, and of *all* our own brethren, is perhaps our most common sin. The Lord taught us that we should have a sense of urgency in our response to others. The Lord showed by His example that it is better to meet the hunger of human need than to keep the letter of Sabbath law (Mk. 2:25,26). *His* urgency, *God's* urgency, *our* consequent urgency… all

means that when even Divine principles appear to come into conflict, we are to be influenced above all by the urgency of others' need.

12:6 *But I say to you, that one greater than the temple is here*- AV "in this place". Sacred space was a big idea within Judaism. The Lord is directly challenging it by stating that He as a person was more holy and significant than the temple. The way He ate with sinners and touched the ritually unclean likewise reflect a redefinition of the holy. The implication could be that the Lord was standing at the edge of a cornfield (He was not within the synagogue- :9)- and He declared everywhere touched by Him to be holy.

12:7 *But if you had known what this means*- This continues the challenge of :3- "Have you never read?". They *had* read, but without understanding. They had read without perceiving meaning- and it led them to "condemn the guiltless". Without unduly exalting intellectualism for its own sake, this is a sobering thought- that the crucifixion of God's Son was the result of a chronic lack of understanding of God's word. To pay lip service to Biblicism is not enough; the meaning in the words, the whole issue of interpretation, is crucially important; getting it wrong can lead to crucifying the Son of God afresh. The Greek *esti* translated 'means' is basically the verb 'to be'- if they had known what the Scripture 'is' they would've have condemned the guiltless. The Bible 'is' its true interpretation, and this idea comes to its ultimate term in the declaration of Jesus as being 'the word'.

I desire mercy- Hos. 6:6 says that Yahweh "desires mercy". These two Hebrew words sound similar to each other- mercy / grace is so identified with God's passion and desire. The same Hebrew words are to be found in the statements that He desires / delights in grace / mercy (Jer. 9:24; Mic. 7:18). If *He* delights in forgiveness and grace, then we should also; His passion should be ours. This of itself outlaws the critical eyes of the Pharisees, noticing the disciples' infringement of a law and feeling the need to 'take up the matter' with them. And it will be the same with us. The human tendency to observe others with eyes of criticism and sensitivity to their weaknesses will be displaced if we simply delight in mercy. The Hosea passage goes on to condemn the Jewish religious leadership in language which the Lord clearly used in constructing the parable of the good Samaritan: "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way by consent" (Hos. 6:8). But there's a subtle twist- the priest in the Lord's story passed by on the other side and simply did nothing. That inaction is paralleled with being as bad as the thieves themselves. The priest was returning from having offered sacrifice, but he didn't show mercy- and God wants mercy and not sacrifice. Note that the passage in Hos. 6:6 is perhaps purposefully ambiguous. It could mean 'I want to see you showing mercy, and not [so much offering] sacrifice'; or it could mean 'I myself want / love / delight

in [showing] mercy rather than [receiving] sacrifice'. The ambiguity is because God's will / love / delight should be ours. And we can read the quotation of that passage here in Mt. 12:7 with the same double meaning. His passion for grace must be ours, and this precludes looking critically at others, eager to perceive their breaches of our perceptions of God's law.

And not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless- Who exactly did the Lord have in mind? He has just used the same word when stating that the priests work on the Sabbath and are "blameless". By condemning the disciples, the Pharisees were thus condemning the priests too. This argument of course supposes that the Lord's secular, spiritually ragtag followers were in fact priests- the priests of the new system He was bringing in. The ultimately guiltless was of course the Lord Himself, and He foresaw their final condemnation of Him, perceiving that in essence it had already happened. For whoever condemns His followers condemns Him, so deeply is He associated with them. But how would the Pharisees have avoided condemning the guiltless disciples by appreciating that God wants mercy and not sacrifice? I suggest that the Lord is again meeting them on their own level: 'You consider the disciples are guilty. OK, that's not what the Law says, but OK, let's assume they are. But if you simply *loved* showing mercy as God does, then you would not have condemned them anyway. You would've overlooked the incident'.

12:8 *For the Son of man is Lord*- Here as elsewhere we see the juxtaposition of the Lord's humanity and His Lordship. His exaltation is precisely because He was human; He has authority to judge us because He was Son of man (Jn. 5:27). The Lordship of Jesus was predicated upon His obedience to death and exaltation (Acts 2:36), and yet Jesus was calmly confident that this would be achieved by Him; to the point that He could reason that He already was "Lord" and thereby able to abrogate the Sabbath and act as the ultimate temple.

Of the Sabbath- The "of" is supplied as guesswork by the translators; it could equally be left unsupplied, giving the sense of "the Lord the Sabbath"; or, "Lord *on* the Sabbath". Mark adds that the Lord went on to teach that God's law was made for man, rather than man being built in such a way as to easily fit in with God's word (Mk. 2:27).

12:9 *And he departed from there and*- Luke's record adds that this was on another Sabbath- at least the next week.

Went into their synagogue- The point is that the Lord was *outside* the synagogue when He declared that the "place" where He was then standing, in or near a cornfield, was holy ground; see on :6. It was "their" synagogue, just as the temple was "the temple of the Jews", and the feasts of Yahweh had been hijacked to become "the feast of the Jews".

12:10 *Behold*- AV. I have suggested that this word is best understood by likening Matthew to a cameraman shooting a movie, who now zooms in on an encounter.

And saw a man having a withered hand. And they asked him, saying: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?-His right hand, according to Luke. His own strength and ability to act was withered.

So that they might accuse him- A legal term. They wanted to get Jesus in court over this issue. But there's no evidence they actually did, and there was no recorded mention of Sabbath breaking in His final trial- so well and profoundly did He answer them.

12:11 *And he said to them: Which of you, if having only one sheep*- A poor man, who had only one sheep- as in the parable Nathan told David. The Lord saw the man with the withered hand as His sheep- His only sheep. Here we have an insight into an old problem: 'Seeing we are many and Jesus is one, how can it be that He feels so uniquely towards me, when He has so many other people to think about and relate to?'. It is possible for God and His Son to have emotional and psychological capabilities which we do not have. The Lord seems to be teaching here that He identifies with the poor, who has only *one* sheep; but He feels to each of us as if we are all that He has. Likewise in the parable of the woman who lost one of her dowry coins; they were all she had. We are all Jesus has. He has no other group on another planet in another dimension- we here on earth, we with all our dysfunction and poor response to His love, are all He has. And further- *you* are all He has. The man had been sick for some time, but the Lord saw his situation as if it had only just happened, that Sabbath day, and felt an urgency to respond.
The *urgency* is a key issue- for the issue wasn't healing, it was why Jesus couldn't wait a few hours until the end of the Sabbath to heal. The Mishnah taught that the Sabbath could be broken if life was in immediate danger (m. Yoma 8.6). The Pharisees obviously reasoned that this wasn't the case- a paralyzed hand could wait a few hours for healing. But Jesus was perhaps making the point that to Him, human need is urgent and cannot wait. We must remember His sense of urgency when we struggle with His apparent slowness to respond. The spirit of urgency comes through the Gospel records and also the Acts.

And it falls into a pit on the Sabbath day- The Law specifically foresaw such a situation, pronouncing judgment against the person responsible for leaving a pit open so that animals might fall into it (Ex. 21:33,34). The Lord's point was that there was not a moment to lose once this happened- there was an urgency to save the animal, and that urgency was far more important than seeking to condemn the person who had breached the law. And this was how the Lord saw that man with a "withered hand"; the need was the call, and to Him there was an urgency

about the situation that was far more important than any concern about legalistic obedience to laws- be they real or imagined.

Will not grab hold of it- This apparently unnecessary detail is included because the same word is used about the Lord's touching or grasping of people before He healed them (Mt. 9:25; Mk. 1:31; 5:41; 9:27). As they would urgently lay hold upon a lost sheep and lift it out of a pit, so the Lord laid hold upon people and healed them. Reflect on how the Lord 'took hold' of people before healing them. This feature of the miracles demonstrated His desire to fully take hold of our human experiences, thereby identifying Himself with us- and on that basis, healing us. The same idea, although a different word, is to be found in the language of Heb. 2:16, speaking of the Lord Jesus taking hold upon humanity by having our nature.

And lift it out?- The same word is used for people 'rising up' after being healed by the Lord (Mt. 8:15; 9:5,6,25; 10:8; 11:5). Jewish people would've thought of the rescue of Joseph and Jeremiah from pits. The healing of this man, like so many of the healing miracles, had a spiritual intention- it was in order to save him from the pit of death. We saw on 11:20 that the purpose of the miracles was to lead people to repentance, not simply to alleviate human need for the sake of it.

12:12 *How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!*- The Lord favourably compares men to animals (to birds, Mt. 6:26; sparrows, Mt. 10:31; and again in Lk. 12:7,24). Whilst in the manner of our death we are as "the beasts of the field", the Lord seems to be at pains to ensure we realize the value and meaning of the human person, made as we are in God's image. If we treat people as animals, we have failed to perceive something of God which is uniquely in humanity.

Therefore- Again, the Lord doesn't base His argument around the obvious misunderstanding of the Law which the Pharisees had. He avoids a tit-for-tat expositional battle over semantics by introducing higher principles- the sheer value and need of the human person transcends any issue of legalistic obedience to any law, be it God's laws or the interpretation of them. This is a principle which legalistic churches need to bear in mind to this day in their decision making.

It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day- Mark records that He developed this point- if He had *not* performed the miracle, He would have been actively committing "evil", even 'killing'. When the Lord taught that it was right to break the Sabbath because they were in the business of saving life (Mk. 3:4), His words were purposefully alluding to how the Maccabees had pronounced that it was acceptable for Jewish soldiers to break the Sabbath in time of war, in order to save lives through their fighting (1 Macc. 2:32). He intended His people to live as active soldiers

on duty, at war in order to save the lives of God's people. Indeed, so frequently, the whole language of the future judgment is applied to us right here and now. We are living out our judgment now; we are standing as it were before the final judgment seat, and receiving our judgment for how we act, speak and feel and are. Thus if He had omitted to heal the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, this would have been 'doing evil' and even 'killing' (Mk. 3:4). That's how seriously He took omitting to do good when it's in our power to do it. He had a choice of saving life or destroying life, were He to prefer to keep the Sabbath laws above the need for preserving life. Clearly He saw failing to act to save life as tantamount to destroying life. We must give our Lord's words their due weight here in our decision making. To not act to save life, to excuse ourselves for whatever reason, is effectively destroying life, or, as Mark's record puts it, "to kill" (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9). We can't therefore be passive in this matter. The context of the Lord's statement was in response to questions about whether something was "lawful" or not; it was the age old question, 'Is it is a sin to do X, Y or Z?'. His answer was as ever in terms of a principle- that our guiding principle must be the saving and healing and preservation of human life. The attitude of the Pharisees was that the Lord was infringing a letter of the law and therefore was guilty of death. They murdered Him on the Sabbath days; and thus they chose to destroy life rather than save it. The word for "to kill" in Mk. 3:4 is so often used in the Gospels about the killing of Jesus. They failed to take His exhortation. The crucifixion of God's Son was thus a result of legalism; it was because of His attitude to the man with the withered hand that the Pharisees first plotted to kill Jesus (Lk. 6:11). Whatever our individual conscience, let us not "be filled with madness" as the Pharisees were at the fact the Lord approached human behaviour in terms of principles, rather than reducing everything to a common right / wrong scenario. The principle is clearly the saving and preservation and enriching of others' lives. Surely we should each allow each other to articulate this fundamental issue as we each have occasion to do so.

12:13 *Then said he to the man: Stretch out your hand*- Matthew uses the same word to describe how the Lord Himself stretched forth *His* hand in order to heal, save and welcome (Mt. 8:3; 12:49; 14:31). Again we are encouraged to perceive a sense of mutuality between the Lord and His people.

And he stretched it out and it was restored whole, as the other- This detail is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is another touch of the eye witness- the man would've held out both his hands and everyone would've looked from the one to the other, observing they now looked so similar.

12:14 *But*- AV "then". Here we see the common human feature of doing evil in response to the experience of grace. Even amongst believers, and

even at judgment day, there is the possibility of the eye becoming evil because of His goodness and grace to others (Mt. 20:15). We see the principle in both secular and church life. Grace shown to others can elicit the worst evil from religious people. We shouldn't be surprised at this phenomenon; but it is the very surprise at encountering it which causes so many to become disillusioned with the church and ultimately with the Lord.

The Pharisees went out- Again, an emphasis on physical movement. We imagine Matthew's camera covering their departure from the synagogue.

And took counsel against him, how they might destroy him- S.w. "a consultation". Nothing formal is necessarily implied by the word. Perhaps we are to imagine them gathering in a tight circle somewhere outside the synagogue.

12:15 *And Jesus perceiving it*- Were there sympathizers for Jesus within the Pharisees who told Him this? Or is this another case of Him perceiving the minds of men?

Withdrew from there; and many followed him and he healed them all- Several times we read of the Lord withdrawing from the public, or at least trying to (Mt. 4:12; 14:13; 15:21; Mk. 3:7; Jn. 6:15). We get the impression that He made public appearances, did some healing and teaching, and then 'withdrew'. The Gospel records focus much on the last week and months of His ministry. The first three years has relatively little recorded- but there is a lot of information about some very long, action packed days. We can assume too easily that these recorded days were typical. But perhaps they were not. There are probably no more than 20 days' events recorded- out of the three and a half years of the Lord's ministry. One possibility is that the rest of the time, or much of it, He spent simply teaching the disciples. If the Lord maintained the same tempo and intensity of His recorded activity throughout the three and a half years, it surely would've been almost impossible to have avoided His being propelled to political power by the masses. This suggestion of limited public activity makes better sense of the note we made on Mt. 11:20, that the majority of His miracles were performed in three small villages in Galilee. That also must provide some context to the comment here that He healed 'all' the multitudes on this occasion; He healed 'all' amongst the crowds who were in need of healing, not every member of the crowd.

Mark adds that the Lord withdrew grieving for their hard hearts. The way the Lord didn’t just ignore the Jewish leaders, as we might ignore trouble makers at a public meeting or correspondence course students who ask endless questions... this is really quite something. He grieved for the hardness of their hearts (Mk. 3:5), and finally broke down and wept over

Jerusalem, in an agony of soul that they would not respond. The apparently foolish catch questions of Mk. 3:21-29 are answered in some depth by the Lord, and He concludes with pointing out that they are putting themselves "*in danger* of eternal damnation" (although, notice, not yet condemned). One senses the urgency with which He put it to them. He was angry [i.e. frustrated?], "being grieved for the blindness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). Are we just indifferent or evenly smugly happy that men are so blind…? Or do we grieve about it to the point of angry frustration? Remember how Moses and Paul would fain have given their eternal life for the conversion of Israel, this is how they felt for them.

12:16 *And charged them that they should not make him known*- It was predicted of the Lord's preaching that He would not "strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice [raised up in this way] in the streets". And for this reason He asked His converts not to "make him known" in this way; He wanted them to witness *as He witnessed* (Mt. 12:16,19). This is quite something, the more we reflect upon it. He rebuked the self-righteous, restored peoples' dignity, alleviated their poverty and sicknesses to give them a foretaste of the future blessings of His Kingdom on earth, opposed legalistic and corrupt religious practices, and ultimately gave His life to show that even His enemies were encompassed in His love. This is the pattern for us, especially in our seeking to do these things in the lives of those who respond to the Gospel.

But the same words ("*make Him known*") are used about how later, He was made known by the church (Acts 4:16; 1 Jn. 3:10). It could well be that as so often with Semitic languages, we must read in an ellipsis- 'Not make Him known [immediately, right then, at that time]'. The implication could be that they were indeed to make Him known- but later. The great commission, to take the knowledge of Christ to all men everywhere, could then be comfortably read in this context; the commission signalled the end of the relative silence which the Lord called for. In line with our comments on how and why the Lord withdrew Himself from the crowds in the preceding verse (:15), it would seem that the Lord was constantly concerned on a practical level that His ministry would be badly impaired if the masses of Palestine rose up out of His control and made Him King. He wanted above all to teach and personally model the Kingdom, and being at the centre of a political uprising thrusting Him forward would not enable that. *Phaneros*, "known", is only elsewhere used in Matthew in the Lord's teaching about what would happen "openly" (s.w.) at the establishment of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 6:4,6,18). The Lord didn't want them trying to establish the Kingdom there and then in their own strength, and especially whilst so seriously misunderstanding the nature and essence of the Kingdom- for they still thought it was all about military victory against Rome. So it could be that the idea of 'to make known' may mean far more than 'Don't tell anyone'; it was

psychologically impossible to expect that multitudes of people who had seen healings would literally not breathe a word to anyone else. It was obvious that healings had been done- people came home healed. To 'not make known' doesn't have to mean 'Don't tell a word of this to anyone', indeed the Lord's parables and other teachings suggest that such telling of others is an inevitable part of response to Him. I suggest it means more of the flavour of 'Don't declare Me publicly as King'.

12:17 *That it might be fulfilled*- This is often stated as the reason why the Lord did and said things. He was consciously seeking to be 'the word made flesh' and consciously tried to fulfil the Old Testament prophecies. Despite strong resistance to this idea by some expositors, Harry Whittaker particularly, it seems to me the most natural understanding of the phrase and the force of the word "That...".

Which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying- The implication could be that Isaiah publicly spoke these words, directing Israel's attention to a "servant" figure of his own time, who all the same failed to be Messianic as intended, meaning that the prophecy had its fulfilment reapplied in Jesus. Or perhaps it was because the Lord was addressing people who had largely only *heard* Isaiah being read. Literacy was only a few percent in first century Palestine, and nobody had the Old Testament scrolls at home. Therefore the Lord speaks in terms of Isaiah *speaking* and *saying*, rather than writing and us reading.

12:18 *Look at My servant whom I have chosen, My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased. I will put My Spirit upon him*- The focus was to be upon beholding Jesus personally, and not listening to endless tales of miracles, inevitably exaggerated as they were passed around. If this is the reason for the quotation, then the stress would be upon *beholding* Him, appreciating Him, rather than seeking to get temporal benefit from His healing miracles.

And he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles- The Lord didn't want the crowds getting so maxed out on His miracles and other physicalities that they paid no attention to His message; for the purpose of His being amongst men was primarily to "show justice". And that justice was to be shown to *Gentiles*- they were to be shown justice and salvation, not slain so that a Kingdom of God open to Jews only could be established upon Gentile corpses. This was the kind of false view of the Kingdom which the Lord didn't hold and didn't want given credibility by associating Himself and His miracles with it. But *krisis*, translated "justice", can also mean judgment in the sense of future judgment to come. Yet these same Gentiles who were to be shown (according to that reading) judgment to come, were to be given the opportunity to trust in the Messiah's Name (:21). And justice [s.w.] was to be "cast out" in victory- i.e. victory against judgment. In Christ, mercy was to triumph against judgment,

rejoicing against it as if after a bitter contest which was won by mercy (James 2:13). But to appreciate that good news, the Gentiles firstly had to realize what "judgment" really was. These were the things the Lord wanted to teach, but to get the points over, He needed the crowds to not be so hyped up by His miracles and to stop all talk of establishing a political Kingdom at that time.

The Lord's showing judgment to the Gentiles and not publicly striving or crying in his preaching (Mt.12:18-21) primarily fulfilled the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 42:1-3. Note how His gentle, low pressure attitude to preaching will be the same in the Kingdom as it was in the first century. In the same way Is. 54:13 concerning the future preaching of the Gospel in the Kingdom is quoted about Christ in Jn. 6:45.

As in :21, the purpose of the healing was to show something to the Gentiles. But there were no Gentiles mentioned as being in the audience. Are we to infer that there were some present? More likely, as this whole incident occurred in a Jewish synagogue (:9), the Lord's point was that the unbelieving amongst God's people are no better than Gentiles. The Lord's miracles showed forth God's judgment principles; in them He showed judgment to the Gentiles, and sent forth God's judgments (Mt. 12:18-20 quotes Is. 42:1-3 concerning how the Lord will do this at the events of the second coming).

12:19 *He shall not strive, nor cry aloud, neither shall anyone hear his voice in the streets*- Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers", the Lord said to Israel (Mt. 23:32)- yet He was alluding to how the Gentile Amorites filled up the cup of God's judgments and then had to drink it. Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

Not strive- This is quoted from the servant song of Is. 42, and the Lord is applying it to all those who follow Him. If *He* is not to strive or clamour in the streets, then neither are those who follow Him to do so. For all that is true of Him is true of them. Paul makes the same point in stating that "the servant of the Lord must not strive" (2 Tim. 2:24). The "servant" is ultimately the Messianic servant of Isaiah's servant songs, but the point is that all that is true of that Servant is true of all those in Him.

The streets- The Lord didn't shout out in the streets who He was. He wished His followers to follow His example in *showing* the message to the world just as He did- in who He was (Mt. 12:18). Christ's instruction to His recent converts not to spread the Gospel in an unseemly way, because it was written about *Him personally that* "he shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear *His* voice in the streets". In other words, the true preacher of Christ is solidly identified with Him by the very act of preaching. Truly "we are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20) in our witnessing. His voice is our voice.

12:20 *A bruised reed he shall not break and a smoking wick he shall not quench*- The Hebrew words used in Is. 42:3 suggest this is a reference to the candlestick; the words respectively mean a shaft / stem, and a wick. Little strength, little light (if the reference is to the reed which took oil to the lamps of the candlestick), little heat- but all the same, the Lord seeks to fan it into life rather than walk away in disappointment; and by doing so, sets a challenging example to many of us, whose most frequent complaint is the weak state of the brotherhood's members. If the reference is to a damaged and smoky candlestick, this becomes the more poignant- for the candlestick was a clear symbol of Israel and then of the ecclesias (Rev. 1:12,13,20; 2:1).

When judgment is finally cast out by mercy at the last day, then the dysfunctional candlestick will be quenched or destroyed in condemnation. Note how the metaphor of quenching a fire is used here for condemnation; but in another metaphor, condemnation is spoken of as the very opposite- unquenchable fire. This is sure proof that we are not to read 'unquenchable fire' as literal.

Until- The Lord's patience with the useless candlestick of Israel and the weakness of the ecclesia will be "until" His final victory over judgment. That happened in one sense on the cross, but in another sense it will only happen when death is swallowed up in victory at the day of judgment. Until then, both He and us are to patiently bear with the damaged and dysfunctional ecclesial candlestick. But in that day, those elements of the candlestick which refuse to give light to the house will be "broken", the Greek meaning 'broken in pieces'- the language of condemnation (Mt. 21:44).

He sends forth judgment to victory- Gk. to cast out, thrust out. See on 12:19 *show justice*. Judgment is cast out *eis*, "in", victory.

12:21 *And in his name shall the Gentiles hope*- Mark's record adds what Matthew strangely omits- that the great crowds whom He charged to not "make Him known" included Gentiles (Mk. 3:6-8). This makes sense of why the Lord healed "all" in the crowd (:15)- the sense is not that He healed every person in the crowd, as not all of them were in need of

healing; perhaps rather the stress on "all" is to show that the sick Gentiles who were present were *also* healed. Note that "In His Name shall the Gentiles trust" is a quotation from the LXX of Is. 42:4 and not the Masoretic Text, which reads "The isles shall wait for His law". The ready acceptance of the LXX by the inspired NT writers, even preferring it over the Hebrew, has many implications. One of them is that the genealogies as found in the LXX do not support the idea of Adam being 4000 years before Christ, which is essential to those who believe that the six day / thousand year periods ended in 2000 AD and the Millennium must now be established.

12:22 *Then was brought to him one*- The Greek is used about bring an offering. We recall how the conversion of individuals is spoken as offering them as a sacrifice in Rom. 15:16. Bringing people to the Lord is offering them to Him because they are to present themselves, or be presented, as living sacrifices in His service (Rom. 12:1). There may therefore be a connection with the use later in this verse of *thereapeuo* for "healed", as this word is also translated "worship" in the sense of Divine worship. The Lord had just cured large numbers of people, but then withdrew from them. Now they find Him again and bring just one sick person for healing. The people were "amazed" (:23) at this one healing- whereas the Lord had healed many sick people in :15. We are left with the impression of how deeply "amazed" the crowds must have been, if there was so much amazement at just one cure, there must have been super amazement at the mass healings.

Possessed with a demon, blind and dumb, and he healed him, so much so that the dumb man spoke and saw- The Greek strictly means to be exercised or controlled by a demon. This is the language used at the time for explaining medical situations which today we would diagnose differently. Blindness and deafness are explicable in medical terms. The verse states that the Lord 'healed' the man and therefore, because of that healing, the blindness and deafness left him. The language of healing of persons is not what we would expect if the Lord instead engaged in battle with demonic entities in Heaven or at least, outside of the man.

12:23 *And all the crowds were amazed, and said*- See on 12:22 *brought*. This is a strong word, meaning utterly astonished, and even used about madness (Mk. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:13).

Can this be the son of David?- The people made a direct connection between the ability to do miracles and being Messiah. Yet earlier in this commentary I have pointed out that generally the Lord worked with an economy of miracle, and the number of miracles He did appear to have decreased as His ministry progressed. His understanding of Isaiah 42:1-3 just quoted was that Messiah should be 'beheld', be understood and appreciated on a spiritual level, rather than be a miracle worker whipping

up mass support because of that. And yet He appreciated the strong connection in peoples' minds between Messiahship and miracles, and He therefore conceded to this by doing miracles.

12:24 *But when the Pharisees heard it, they said: This man does not cast out demons but*- Their comment appears to have been made in very hot blood, for it was logically contradictory to claim that someone who cast out demons must therefore be in league with the prince of the demons; because their own sons (either literally or in the sense of their disciples) claimed to cast out demons (:27). And if Jesus was actually on the side of the prince of demons, why then was he as it were fighting for the other side by casting out demons. Such gaping error in logic was exactly what the Pharisees were constantly careful to avoid; but their intense jealousy of the Lord led them to make this logical error. Again we note that the Lord's style was not so much to directly state the errors of his opponents, but to work on the assumption that their beliefs were correct- and to then follow those beliefs to their logical conclusions, thus showing how those positions contradicted themselves to the point they could not be true. This is one explanation for the use of the language of demons in the Gospels, even though demons don't in fact exist.

By Beelzebub- By the instrumentality of Beelzebub. They were driven to assume that the Lord was in league with some higher power in order to perform His miracles. If it wasn't the Holy Spirit of God- it had to be by some other power, and the only option in their theology was some form of the Satan myth. Their logical desperation is a reflection of the undeniable nature of the Lord's miracles (as in Acts 4:16). Any who claim to be able to do miracles through the Holy Spirit should likewise be producing healings which even their most sceptical opponents cannot deny are miracles; but that feature is not seen in many claims of healings today. When accused of being in league with 'satan', the Lord didn't read them a charge of blasphemy. He reasoned instead that a thief cannot bind a strong man; and likewise He couldn't bind 'satan' unless He were stronger than Satan (cp. Mk. 3:23-27). He doesn't take the tack that 'Satan / Beelzebub / demons' don't exist; He showed instead that He was evidently stronger than any such being or force, to the point that belief in such a concept was meaningless. Faith must rather be in Him alone.

The Jews accused the Lord of being in league with the prince of the demons, Beelzebub. His comment was that if the family / house of Satan was so divided, then Satan "has an end" (Mk. 3:26). His approach was 'OK you believe in demons, Beelzebub etc. Well if that's the case, then according to the extension of your logic, Satan will soon come to an end, will cease existence. That's the bottom line. As it happens, I am indeed 'binding the strong man', rendering Satan powerless, making him 'have an end', and so whichever way you look at it, believing in demons or not, the bottom line is that My miracles demonstrate that effectively Satan is

powerless and not an item now'. The way the New Testament is written reflects the same approach. When the Lord was alone with His disciples, He explained further: "If they have called the Master of the House [i.e. Jesus] 'Beelzebub', how much more shall they call them of his household?" [i.e. the disciples] (Mt. 10:25). By saying this, the Lord was clarifying that of course He didn't *really* mean that He was part of the Satan family, working against Satan to destroy the entire family. Rather was He and His family quite separate from the Satan family. But He didn't make that clarification to the Jewish crowds – He simply used their idea and reasoned with them on their own terms. Note in passing how the Jews actually thought Jesus was Beelzebub, or Satan. This would be one explanation for their mad passion to kill Him; for those labelled 'Satan' were hunted to their death in such societies, as seen later in the witch hunts of the middle ages. The Jews say Jesus as a false miracle worker, a false Messiah, a bogus Son of God – all characteristics of their view of 'Satan'. Some centuries later, the Jewish sage Maimonides described Jesus in terms of the antichrist: "Daniel had already alluded to him when he presaged the downfall of a wicked one and a heretic among the Jews who would endeavour to destroy the Law, claim prophecy for himself, make pretences to miracles, and allege that he is the Messiah" (*Maimonides' Epistle to Yemen*). It's been suggested that the way the Jewish rabbinical writings call Him *Yeshu* is an acronym for the Hebrew expression *yemach shemo vezichro* – "May his name and memory be obliterated"). This was the very Jewish definition of Satan. They saw Jesus as Satan himself; hence they were so insistent on slaying Him. Yet by the deft twist of Divine providence, it was through the death of Jesus that the *real* Devil (i.e. the power of sin) was in fact slain (Heb. 2:14). To those with perceptive enough minds to see it, yet once again the Jewish ideas had been turned back upon them to reveal the real nature of the Devil to them, within their own frames of reference and terminology. Likewise Beelzebub means literally 'the lord of the house'; and the Lord Jesus alludes to this in describing Himself as the Master of the House of God.

Judaism had taken over the surrounding pagan notion of a personal 'Satan'. And the Lord Jesus and the Gospel writers use this term, but in the way they use it, they redefine it. The parable of the Lord Jesus binding the "strong man" – the Devil – was really to show that the "Devil" as they understood it was now no more, and his supposed Kingdom now taken over by that of Christ. The last Gospel, John, doesn't use the term in the way the earlier Gospels do. He defines what the earlier writers called "the Devil" as actual people, such as the Jews or the brothers of Jesus, in their articulation of an adversarial ['satanic'] position to Jesus.

The Prince of the demons- Archon, "the first", would imply that Beelzebub

was also a demon, the "first" or leading one. Thus the fallacy of their argument is the more apparent- if Beelzebub really existed, why would he cast out his own fellow demons?

12:25 *And knowing their thoughts, he said to them*- But they had "said" these things (:24). Perhaps they said these things within their own minds. Or maybe the contrast is to highlight the upcoming teaching that thoughts are as good as words (:34-37). To hear their words was to know their thoughts.

Every kingdom- Again the Lord accepts their position for one moment as true, and yet takes it forward to its logical implication. If Beelzebub was fighting against his own side, then all the same, Satan's Kingdom was divided against itself and would soon crumble into self-destruction. Therefore what Jesus had done ought to be seen as a presage of Satan's Kingdom ending and, by implication, the soon triumph of God's Kingdom.

Divided against itself- The Lord Jesus framed His parable about Satan's kingdom rising up and being divided against itself in the very language of the Kingdom of Israel being "divided" against itself by Jeroboam's 'rising up' (1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 13:6)- as if Israel's Kingdom was Satan's kingdom.

Is brought to desolation- The Lord only uses the Greek word elsewhere with regard to latter day Babylon's destruction as a result of her followers rising up against her (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). This typically been how God destroyed Israel's enemies in the Old Testament- by them turning upon themselves. It follows another great Biblical theme- that those who ultimately will be condemned are in practice self-condemned and bring about their own condemnation.

And every city or house divided against itself shall not stand- The Lord is teaching that the breakup of a Kingdom, even Satan's, must start on the household level and progress higher. Perhaps this is a hint at the growth of *God's* kingdom beginning with the household conversions and house churches with which Christianity started.

12:26 *And if Satan*- Mark adds that the Lord spoke all this "in parables" (Mk. 3:23). 'Satan' was a parable and is being used here in a non-literal sense. The Lord reasons with them on their own ground, assuming for a moment that their wrong ideas were true- hence "*if* Satan...". The one who cast out Satan / demons was of course Jesus personally. Their false logic and theology had led them to label a good man as Satan just because He did a good work of healing. So quickly, false logic and theology drives jealous people along a path of demonization, negative labelling of others and religious hatred.

Casts out Satan- But the argument is about casting out of *demons* (:27). One thing we learn from this use of language is that beliefs about 'Satan', demons and the casting out of demons were very vague and poorly defined. And that is how it is to this day with those who believe in the literal existence of 'Satan' and demons. When pressed for definition and a more connected theology, they flounder.

He is divided against himself. How then shall his kingdom stand?- Ez. 17:14 uses this language about how Old Testament kingdom of Judah no longer 'stood' because of their disobedience. The true Kingdom of God would 'stand' for ever (Dan. 2:44). The Lord may be hinting that Israel was no longer God's Kingdom and was in fact therefore Satan's kingdom- for the true Kingdom of God would always stand. It is Satan's Kingdom which falls, not God's.

12:27 *And if I*- Three times in succession the Lord uses the "if... " clause. Logic and consequence of position is therefore significant to Him. If it were not, it would totally not matter what we believed about anything.

By Beelzebub- 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

Cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?- The miracles claimed by the Jews would've compared poorly with the Lord's, rather like the attempts by the Egyptian magicians to imitate the miracles of Moses. The Lord never makes that point directly. He accepts that these people claimed to 'cast out demons' and reasons as if that is true- in order to clinch the greater point, that their whole belief system was deeply flawed. It seems to me that this is one reason why the NT writers go along with the idea of demons- to demonstrate by colossal implication that either they do not exist, or they are utterly powerless.

Therefore shall they be your judges- Their own sons who had claimed to do miracles would be presented at the day of judgment when their lives were examined. The point would be made that they had condemned Jesus for something which their own sons did, and yet they had not condemned *them*, and therefore they would be condemned / judged at the hands of their own sons. Likewise the Lord reasoned that the presence of the Queen of Sheba at judgment day would be a condemnation for some in first century Israel (12:42). Judgment day will not be a mere yes / no encounter. Our lives will be laid bare, specific

incidents raised and the implications of them discussed, with the persons involved or implicated standing there giving testimony; or at least, this is how it shall be for the rejected. There is a colossal importance to life and living, to justice, to the implications of actions. It's no good just shrugging and hoping for the best, allowing the passage of time to work a kind of pseudo-atonement, whereby we forget the implications of our actions.

The fact the Pharisees' children cast out demons condemned the Pharisees. Noah's very example was a condemnation of his world (Heb. 11:7); the very existence of believing Gentiles judges the Jews as condemned (Rom. 2:27); and the very existence of the repentant Ninevites condemned first century Israel (Mt. 12:41). The faithful preaching of the Corinthians would judge an unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:24). Noah's very act of righteousness in building the ark condemned / judged those who saw it and didn't respond (Heb. 11:7). This is why the rejected will be shamed before the accepted; they will bow in shame at their feet (Rev. 3:9; 16:15). Perhaps it is in this sense that "we shall judge angels" (1 Cor. 6:3)- rejected ecclesial elders, cp. the angels of the churches in Rev. 2,3? The point is, men's behaviour and conduct judges others because of the contrast it throws upon them. And this was supremely true of the Lord. No wonder in the naked shame and glory of the cross lay the supreme "judgment of this world".

12:28 *But if I by the Spirit of God*- One reason the Lord did miracles was to try to drive people towards a final decision about Him- see :30. Either He did them by the Spirit, and was therefore attested at God's Messiah and providing a true foretaste of the Messianic Kingdom- or, as the Pharisees claimed, the source of power He was clearly tapping into must be from 'the other side', from evil. The population were therefore faced with a deep choice- either He was who He claimed, or He was an agent of Satan. There was no middle position. It was clear that Jesus, a manual worker from Nazareth, had access to some cosmic power on a scale previously unknown in the earth. The Bible clearly teaches that there is no power but of God. And there is only one God. Those teachings alone make redundant any concept of a personal cosmic Satan and demons. If I had faced off against first century Palestinians deeply persuaded of demonic forces, I think I would've gone down the road of arguing that the God of Israel is omnipotent, quoting Is. 45:7 etc. But the Son of God did it differently. He demonstrated beyond doubt, even by his fiercest enemies, that He had access to superhuman power. He was happy to bear with their idea that there were two 'powers' in the cosmos- of good (from Yahweh) and evil (from Satan). But He then argued that seeing He was doing good, He must therefore have access to that good power. He must, therefore, have unique relationship with Yahweh. Those who clung on to their beliefs in Satan and the power of evil were left with no option but to accept that either He was of Satan, or of God. And seeing His works were *good* (as they grudgingly admit in Jn. 10:33), they really had to

accept He was of God. And clearly His power was such that effectively, the supposedly 'evil force' was of no account. The next verse goes on to develop the point- that these miracles were a plundering of the palace of 'Satan', so therefore the power of Jesus was such that He had effectively subdued this being and left 'him' powerless. This was a far more effective path to take than a point blank denial of the existence of any evil power or Satan figure. A comparison of Mt. 12:28 and Lk. 11:20 shows that "the finger of God" and "the spirit of God" are parallel - God in action is His spirit.

Cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you- The Greek *phthano* can carry the idea of to anticipate or precede; it is translated "go before" in 1 Thess. 4:15. The Lord's miracles were a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God on earth will be, with no sickness and total healing, spiritually and physically. In the ministry and person of Jesus we see a foretaste of how the Kingdom of God will actually be; and 'the Kingdom' was a title of Christ, so closely was He personally the epitome of that time (Lk. 17:21). If we want to know what the future Kingdom of God on earth will be like- look at the person and actions of Jesus. He was in Himself the proclamation and essence of that Kingdom. The descriptions of a renewed earth in Isaiah focus very much on the physicalities of that time, and at best describe the situation during the initial part of God's Kingdom. But the ultimate spiritual essence of life in eternity is to be found in Jesus as a person.

12:29 *Or how can one enter into the house of the strong man and ruin his goods*- 'Beelzebub' can mean 'Lord of the house'. The 'strong man' is clearly 'Satan' in the parable the Lord is creating here (Mk. 3:23). See on :28 *by the Spirit*. And note the allusions to Samson (Jud. 14:18). The strength of sin, and thereby the extent of the Lord's victory, is brought out by another unreal element in the Lord's picture of "a strong man fully armed [guarding] his own court" (Lk. 11:21 RV). This householder is fanatic; he wanders around fully armed to protect his own courtyard and his goods, rather than getting servants or guards to do it. The Lord being "stronger than he" through the cross was therefore indeed strong.

Except he first bind the strong man?- The binding of the strong man was already in process, for the Lord's miracles were proof that his goods were being spoiled and he was powerless to stop it. But the ultimate binding of the enemy was in the Lord's death- and several times the records of the Lord's passion use the word to describe how He was 'bound'. Surely He was encouraged by the intended paradox- that through His binding, the power of sin was being bound. The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

The idea of Christ binding satan (the "strong man"), stealing his goods and sharing them with His followers is a picture of His victory on the cross. It is full of allusion to Is. 53:12, which says that on account of the fact that Christ would pour out His soul unto death and bear our sins, "he shall divide the spoil with the strong (Heb: 'those that are bound')". With the same thought in mind, Paul spoke of how through the cross, Christ "*spoiled* principalities and powers" (Col. 2:15). It may be that this is one of many examples of the New Testament writers thinking in a Hebrew way, despite writing in Greek. "Principalities and powers" is perhaps an intensive plural, referring to the *great* principality and power, i.e. Satan. The way He 'triumphed over them in himself' (Gk. + AVmg.) would certainly make more sense if they referred to the Biblical devil / satan which was overcome within Christ (cp. the language of Heb. 2:14-18; 1 Pet. 2:24). Eph. 2:15,16 appears to be parallel to Col. 2:15. It speaks of how Christ "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments... for to make *in himself* of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Col. 2:15 speaks of the Lord on the cross as the victorious champion, killing "principalities and powers" and then triumphing over them by sharing their spoils with his soldiers. Eph. 2:15 speaks of Christ on the cross "slaying the enmity" (the Biblical Devil) and achieving peace and reconciliation for all those within His body. Yet in the immediate context, the Lord is offering an explanation of why His miracles proved He was the Messiah. He hadn't yet died on the cross; but He was doing the works which were possible as a result of the binding of Satan which He would then achieve. This is yet another example of the Lord's confidence that He would overcome, and God going along with Him in this. The Lord's miracles were a physical foretaste of the great spiritual blessings which would be made available as a result of the binding of Satan by Christ's death and resurrection.

And then he will ruin his house- AV "Spoil his goods*".* The same word is used in Mt. 11:12 of how the Kingdom of God is being "taken by force" by those entering into it. The "spoils" of Satan are those things which he has taken away; surely the spoils taken from Satan by Christ refer to the righteousness which our nature takes away from us. Lk. 11:22 adds another detail to the story. The "armour" of Satan which he depends upon is taken away by Christ on the cross, and then Satan is bound, and his spoils shared out. The armour of Satan is the antithesis of the armour of righteousness (Eph. 6:11,13). As the Kingdom of God has a God who dwells in darkness, a Prince, an armour, a Christ, a dominion, a will and spirit, fruits, rewards etc., so does the kingdom of (the personified) Satan. The armour of righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit, the righteous characteristics of the Spirit. The armour of Satan is the fruits of the flesh nature. These have been taken away by Christ, He has bound Satan, and therefore what Satan has robbed us of, the fruits of righteousness, his

spoils, can be taken at will by the Lord Jesus. We have shown that Christ was alluding to Is. 53:12, which says that through the cross, Christ divides the spoil with the bound ones, i.e. us. In this lies a paradox. Binding is associated with sin (Ps. 68:6; Is. 61:1; Lam. 1:14; Lk. 13:16). We are bound, in many ways, intrinsically limited by our own natures. Only at the second coming will Satan be bound, i.e. the Lord's personal achievement will be physically shared with the world (Rev. 20:2). Yet we, the bound ones, are given the goods which the Lord personally took away from the bound Satan. Those goods are the righteous attributes which our natures stop us possessing as we should. The dividing of the spoils to us by the victorious Lord (Lk. 11:22; Is. 53:12) recalls how the Lord divided *all* His goods between His servants (Mt. 25:14), the dividing of *all* the Father's goods between the sons (representing the good and bad believers, Lk. 15:12).

We have elsewhere shown that these goods refer to the various aspects of the supreme righteousness of Christ which are divided between the body of Christ. The spoils divided to us by the Lord are the various aspects of righteousness which He took for Himself from Satan. The picture of a bound strong man having his house ransacked before his eyes carries with it the idea of suspense, of daring, of doing something absolutely impossible. And so the idea of Christ really taking the righteousness which the Satan of our very natures denies us, and giving these things to us, is almost too much to believe. It is normally the fellow-soldiers who share the spoils (cp. Heb. 7:4). But we didn't even fight; the spoils are divided amongst the bound ones (Is. 53:12 Heb.). Satan in general is still unbound (cp. Rev. 20:2). Christ bound the Satan within Himself personally, and took the spoils of victory for Himself. Col. 2:15 says that Christ "spoiled" as a result of His victory on the cross; and the Greek specifically means 'to completely divest *for oneself*'. He is being painted as the lone hero who took it all for Himself; of the people there was none with Him in His great battle on the cross (Is. 63:3). And indeed, He was the lone hero. But the point is that He has shared with us the spoils of righteousness which He took for Himself as a result, even though we are not worthy to receive them. Seeing the teaching of the Lord is just outline principle, it is evident that through His death He gained possession of absolute righteousness, and then shared this with us. In the first century, the outward demonstration of this was in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. "He led captivity captive (more language of the heroic victor), and gave gifts unto men", the miraculous gifts, in the first century context (Eph. 4:8,11). But what was taken away from Satan was not only power over illness. If this was the main meaning of Satan being bound and his spoils shared with us, then it would follow that the effect of Christ's binding of Satan was only in the first century; for those miraculous gifts of the Spirit are no longer available; illness still triumphs over God's people. The spoils of Satan refer to the righteousness which Satan limits and denies. It is this which has been taken from him, and divided to us all as a result of the cross. The miracles of the first century were a physical

reflection of this, just as the rending of the temple veil and resurrection of some dead saints was a physical foretaste of the spiritual possibilities opened up by the Lord's death. There are many references to the spiritual blessings which are even now mediated to us (as the whole body of Christ) on account of the Lord's death; we (as a community) are given peace and "eternal life" (Jn. 14:27; 17:2; 1 Jn. 5:11), knowledge (2 Cor. 4:6), wisdom (Eph. 1:17; James 1:15), peace (2 Thess. 3:16), understanding (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:7), love in our hearts (Rom. 5:5), grace (Eph. 4:7), comfort (2 Thess. 2:16), righteousness (Rom. 5:16,17), confidence (2 Tim. 1:7), sexual self-restraint (1 Cor. 7:7). All the different aspects of the 100% righteousness of our Lord, *all* His goods, the spoils He personally took from Satan, are divided up amongst ourselves, some having spiritual possibilities in one area, others in another. As a community we are counted as if we have overcome the world, overcome Satan, as Christ did, although on a human level we are still bound (Jn. 16:33 cp. 1 Jn. 2:13,14; 5:4). Only at the day of judgment will we have overcome all (Rev. 21:7 cp. Lk. 11:22 s.w.), but we are treated as if we have already done so.
Goods- If indeed sickness was caused by Satan's power, then the Lord's miracles were a spoiling of his goods. The language here is clearly parabolic- including the reference to 'Satan'. But the miracles were an invitation to others to come and share in the victory the Lord Jesus had won over the 'strong man'; and this provides the context for the 'gathering' of the next verse.

12:30 *He that is not with Me is against Me*- The original is memorable- either *meta* Me, or *kata* Me. The Lord is speaking here from *His* perspective. For He Himself observed that Judas 'ate *with Me*', but lifted up his heel '*against* Me' (Jn. 13:18). It's simply not so that all those who claim to be with the Lord are therefore with Him and on the same side as we who know we are in truth 'with' Him. He is simply observing an ultimate truth- that finally, there will be (and therefore is not now) any middle position in relation to Him. It's not therefore for us to insist that anyone who claims to be 'with Him' is so merely because they say so. Let His words sink in to you personally: “He who is not with me is against me… he that is not against us is for us” (Mt. 12:30; Mk. 9:40). We may think we are not against the Lord’s cause, even if we’re not as committed to it as we might be; many an unbaptized young person has told me this. But to be ‘not against’ Jesus means we must be *with Him*. Nobody can be passively ‘not against’ Jesus. If we’re not whole heartedly with Him, we’re against Him. That’s how His demanding logic goes. A relationship with Him demands the whole person; *you*, your very heart and essence.

And he that does not gather with me scatters- In connection with the gathering of spoil from the strong man's house in :29. There is a tendency to use this verse as a general statement of principle, but the

surrounding context is specifically about the Lord's healing miracles being part of the spoil He has plundered from the 'Lord of the house', Beelzebub / Satan. We saw on :28 that people were faced with the choice of accepting the Lord's miracles were performed using either God's power, or Satan's. The whole issue pushed the audience to a crucial choice- of accepting of Jesus as God's special Son, or as Satan. The miracles were proof that the Lord Jesus had bound the power of Satan- the power which people believed was behind illness. If you didn't want to go and gather the spoil, then you were actively scattering it abroad. This hyperbole was used to force all the cautious people who remained undecided to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as agnosticism. If you are not eagerly gathering the spoil the Lord has now released, then you are actively working against Him.

12:31 *Therefore I say to you: Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men*- His simple claim that God can forgive men all sins was radical (see the parallel Mk. 3:28)- for the Rabbis had a whole list of unforgivable sins, like murder, apostasy, contempt for the Law, etc. But the Lord went further. His many words of judgment weren't directed to the murderers and whores and Sabbath breakers; they were instead directed against those who condemned those people, considering themselves righteous. He calls those who appeared so righteous a 'generation of vipers'. The publican, not the Pharisee, finds God's acceptance, according to Jesus. And again, the Lord is making a telling point- because Rabbis held that repentance for publicans was almost impossible, because it was impossible for them to know exactly all the people they'd cheated. Very clearly, the Lord's message was radical. He was out to form a holy people from whores and gamblers, no-good boys and conmen. And moreover, He was out to show that what God especially judges and hates are the things that humanity doesn't think twice about: hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, exclusion of others… See on 10:29.

But the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven- The exposition offered above suggests that people were forced to a choice. Jesus of Nazareth had access to superhuman power, far more than anyone had ever had. Which power was it, within the framework of their dualistic view of the cosmos- of Satan or God? Was He God's supreme agent on earth- or Satan's? There was no middle ground. All had to choose. The miracles were good. Therefore, it was Satan who had been bound. Jesus was therefore of God. To insist He was from Satan was to wilfully refuse to believe the evidence God had placed before them. There was no forgiveness for this choice- whilst it continued. If anyone wanted to repent and accept that Jesus was of God, to gather with Him, to be with Him rather than against Him- then that was always possible. Note that there is no statement that *repentance* is impossible, rather that *forgiveness* is impossible whilst a person is in the position of so

strongly rejecting Christ as God's Son. For those who did accept Christ as of God rather than of Satan, then "all manner of sin" could be forgiven them, including even at times speaking against Him personally (:32). From one viewpoint, the only way we cannot be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in the new covenant. The Lord laboured the point that the "unforgivable sin" was to "blaspheme the Holy Spirit" (Mk. 3:28-30; Mt. 12:31-37; Lk. 12:10). But it's been demonstrated that this is a reference to Jewish writings and traditions such as Jubilees 15:33 "where not circumcising one's child is unforgivable, because it is a declaration that one does not belong to the covenant people".

12:32 *And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man*- See on :31. The sin of stating that Jesus was Satan's agent rather than God's could not be forgiven whilst it continued to be the position of a person- although repentance was always possible. For those who had accepted Jesus as God's unique agent, they can be forgiven all manner of failure (:31), including speaking "a word" against Him. Maybe the Lord foresaw the situations in which persecution could be avoided for an apparently few words calling Him accursed. And He, along with Matthew, wanted to assure those who would do this in the weakness of a moment that in fact they had *not* blasphemed the Spirit and were not beyond forgiveness. The 'speaking against' is clearly parallel to 'blaspheming'. Blaspheming the name of Jesus was and is required by various anti-Christian regimes such from Judaism through the Roman empire to fundamentalist Islamic states today. Surely the Lord had this in mind. And the encouragement is that this is forgivable. But to decide He is not the Son of God but the embodiment of evil is a situation for which there is no forgiveness because it is wilfully continued in. The Lord has just stated that whoever is not with Him is against Him (:30), but here He foresees a situation when one of those who is ultimately 'with Him' will speak 'against Him'- and yet be forgiven. Because that moment of failure was not the overall position of a man's life. The denials by Peter, replete with curses / blasphemy, would surely be the parade example.

The “son of man” here could refer to Jesus, but it could just as comfortably mean ‘human beings’. One angle on this passage is to remember that the Gospels were written as a means of preaching to Jewish people at some point after the Lord’s resurrection. The message may be: ‘Whatever sin you committed against Jesus, even to the point of crucifixion, is forgivable. But now the Holy Spirit is witnessing to you through the apostles to repent and accept His forgiveness. If you refuse *that*, then there will [obviously] be no forgiveness for you’. The Lord foresaw the situation as it would be in the lives of his audience, and that explains His language here.

It shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him- Whenever we sin, we are judged by the court

of Heaven as deserving condemnation. Yet now is our day of opportunity; the verdict really is given, but we can mercifully change it. Consider the implications of the parallel Mk. 3:29: "he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness but is in danger of *eternal* damnation". Not being *ever* forgiven is paralleled with having *eternal* damnation. The implication is that when we sin and are unforgiven, we are condemned. But in this life we can be forgiven, and therefore become uncondemned. Abimelech was "but a dead man" for taking Sarah (Gen. 20:3), as if although he was alive, for that sin he was in God's eyes condemned and dead. But that verdict for that case was changed by his change of the situation.

Neither in this age, nor in the age to come- This is not suggesting that there is some kind of forgiveness in this world and another kind of forgiveness in the world to come, the Kingdom age. Rather is the simple point being made that the forgiveness granted or not granted now is directly related to "the world to come". The judgment is as it were ongoing now. The positions we adopt now are those we shall eternally hold.

12:33 *Either make*- In their interpretation of Jesus they had to see Him as either good or bad, and He urged them to make a choice. The miracles were good fruit- therefore He was good, and working by God's Spirit rather than being an agent of Satan. The fruit of the tree equals the words (as in Prov. 12:14; 13:2); a corrupt man will speak corrupt words. And these will be the basis of his condemnation. By contrast "the fruit of *our* lips" should be praise (Heb. 13:15). "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Eph. 4:29) refers to this passage- the corrupt fruit is corrupt words. But the idea is that we bear the fruit *now*- our words *now* are our fruit.

The tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt- The Lord had taught in the Sermon on the Mount that it was a fundamental principle with Him that true spirituality cannot be hidden; what is within is openly revealed, even in this life. Good fruit means a good tree. His works were the good fruit. The Pharisees were claiming that His fruits, His works, were corrupt, and therefore He was corrupt. The Lord is asking everyone, especially the disciples, to decide one way or the other- either He is a good man doing good works, or an evil man doing evil works. There is no half way position, as He made clear in :30 ("He that is not with Me is against Me"). They were to 'make' or consider, decide, about Him one way or the other.

And its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit- As so often, the Lord is repeating the principles of His opening manifesto in the Sermon on the Mount (cp. Mt. 7:17,18). The fruit of a man's life reflects who he

essentially is; the good fruit of the Lord's miracles was clear proof He was not of Satan but God's Son and supreme agent.

12:34 *You offspring of vipers*- A clear allusion to the Jews as the seed of the serpent of Gen. 3:15 who would be the ones who would be in conflict with the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus.

How can you- Because of the principle that who we are internally is ultimately reflected by our external actions and words (:33), it was impossible that their 'good words' could be sincere because the other fruit of their lives showed they were rotten within. "How can you..." doesn't mean that they could not change. It means that given their present internal condition, they could never speak good things. The 'good word' which the context has in view is the confession that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son; the evil word was that He was Satan's agent. This wrong judgment of Jesus' identity was because of their evil heart. Their doctrinal mistake was a reflection of their internal fleshly thinking. The Lord said that the Jews were evil, and therefore good things could not come from them (Mt. 12:34; 7:17-20). And yet He also said, presumably with the same audience in mind, that although they were evil, they potentially knew how to give good things, e.g. to their children; and therefore how much could God give them good things if they repented (Mt. 7:11).

Being evil speak good things- This may be an intensive plural, 'the good thing'. The good thing to be spoken was the confession that Jesus was Son of God. John's Gospel emphasizes this, and Rom. 10:9,10 suggests that a verbal confession of Jesus as Lord was required in the conversion process: "if you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and shall believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation". This confession was likely made at baptism, as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. We must ever remember that Matthew's gospel is the transcript of his preaching of the Gospel; it was a missionary document, intended to bring forth the confession that Jesus is Lord and Son of God. This is not to say that the Lord's teaching here does not establish basic principles regarding the connection between thought and speech. It does. But the specific context is of confessing that He is Lord rather than of Satan.

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks- Gk. 'that which remains'. The idea may be that a certain amount of human thought is taken up with basic human functioning, but that which remains over and above that, the part of our thinking which we can consciously control, is what must be controlled- for it is that part of our thinking which controls the words and actions which are the fruit on the tree of a man's life (:33).

12:35 *The good man*- The good man is as the good tree. His good fruit or works is because of a good mind within- and vice versa. The Lord as always took the issue to its deepest essence- which was within the deepest heart. He was the ultimate "good man" and good tree. His good works came forth from deep within Him, they were a reflection of His mind.

Out of his good treasure brings forth good things- The heart is our wealth. This is the real gold and silver, the core value of a man's life- what we are thinking about. Spiritual mindedness is the essence of Christianity.

And the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth- The Lord uses the same word to speak of "this evil (AV "wicked") generation" in :45. The problem with Jewish society as a whole was how they thought. This is the Biblical emphasis- sin comes from our thinking, and not because society is controlled by a personal cosmic 'satan' figure.

Evil things- The words of blasphemy accusing Jesus of being Satan's agent.

12:36 *And I say to you, that every idle word that men shall speak*- Gk. lazy, unproductive. At first blush, this seems a strange word to use in the context of explaining that the words of blasphemy the Jews had uttered would be judged at the last day. We expect a word to be used which carries the sense of blasphemy or proactive aggression. Instead, the Lord uses this word for "idle". His point was that what is ultimately wrong with blasphemy is what is wrong with all unspiritual language- it is not creative, not productive, it is a waste of potential resource. We marvel at His insight. Words can be powerful and creative, but we will answer for those which are not. The connection between Rom. 14:12 and Mt. 12:36 suggests that Paul recognized that we all speak idle words which we will have to give account of at judgment. Therefore, because of our rampant tongue, we will stand in deep need of grace. So therefore, Paul says, you'd better be soft on your brother now, in this life. Every word will be judged (Mt. 12:36), and in some cases by words we will justified and by our speech we will be condemned. So we must speak as those who will be judged for what we speak (James 2:12). The man who *says* to his brother 'Raca' or 'You fool' is in real danger of hell fire (Mt. 5:22). The tongue has the power to cast a man into hell fire (James 3:5,6)- some may be condemned for what they have said, perhaps connecting with how the beast is thrown into the fire of destruction because of his words (Dan. 7:11,12). Thus there is a link between the judgment of the unworthy and that of the world. The process of condemnation will remind the wicked of all their hard words and hard deeds (Jude 15). Yet now, we can speak words all too easily. Yet we talk and speak as those whose words will be taken into account at the last day. This little selection of passages is powerful- or ought to be. There is reason to think that specific record is

kept of incidents, and in some form there will be a 'going through' of them. Thus when self-righteous Jews told their brethren "Stand by yourself, come not near me, for I am holier than you", God comments that "This is written before Me... I will recompense" (Is. 65:5,6).

They shall give account of it in the day of judgment- For every idle *rhema* ["word"], men shall give a *logos* ["account"], another word. We shall have to explain the *logos*, the intention, of idle words. Literally we will have to give a word for a word. This surely suggests that words will be as it were played back to us in that day and we will explain the *logos* , the intention and inner sense, behind those words. But the Lord of course will know all this anyway. It will be a profound preparation for entry into eternity- to have our idle words played back to us, and our having to give an explanation of what our innermost thought behind them really was. The whole process will elicit self-knowledge to the ultimate extent. The words behind 'give an account' are found elsewhere in NT teaching about judgment. We must give an account of our stewardship of the Lord's goods (Lk. 16:2), give an account of our moral lives (1 Pet. 4:3-5), give an account of those under our spiritual care (Heb. 13:17); and give an account / logos of our idle words. Without doubt, judgment will not be a mere yes / no decision, nor an awards ceremony. It will be a revelation to ourselves of our motives, the *logos* behind our words and actions.

12:37 *For by your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned*- In the context, the Lord is referring to how their words regarding Him being an agent of Satan would lead to their condemnation. Yet their words had all started from basic jealousy which ran on unbridled. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16). The reference may be to Eliphaz (Job 15:6): “Your own mouth condemns you, and not I”; or to Prov. 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue”. And yet perhaps even now, men are justified by their words before the court of Heaven- for 'justify' means to pronounce righteous, and this pronouncement / justification is therefore given even now. "So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it" (1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. The specific words which some have spoken will be the reason for their condemnation. "Their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue" (Hos. 7:16)- not so much for their idolatry, their worldliness… but for their uncontrolled and cruel words. By our words we will be acquitted [Gk.] and by our words we will be condemned (Mt. 12:37)- but it is God who acquits, and therefore nobody but He can condemn us (Rom. 8:33; Is. 50:8). Yet how does and how will He do this? Surely on the basis of our acquittal or

condemnation of others. The connection in thought surely shows that through our words, we form our own judgment of ourselves, to acquittal or condemnation.

Our eternal destiny will be *ek*, from out of, our words. If the Lord had simply meant 'according to, on account of', another word or construction would've been used. The use of *ek* suggests that the decision on our eternity will not only be on account of our words, but *in* our own words- for it will be *out of* our own mouths. We think of David's response to Nathan's parable and how his own words were his appropriate judgment. Lk. 19:22 is clearest: "Out of [*ek*] your own mouth will I judge you". The servants *thoughts* about his Lord are then cited back to him as if they were his spoken *words*, and he is judged according to those words. There could be no more powerful exhortation as to the significance of spoken words, but the appeal must not be to merely curb the tongue by brute psychological force, but rather to have the new mind and spirit of Christ which simply will not speak words leading to condemnation. The intensity and deeply personal force of the Lord's reasoning was such that that group of Pharisees went silent and brought in another group to raise yet more legalistic and theological issues with Him; but those things were and are to this day simply a way of trying to take the Lord's intense and practical *moral* pressure off us. It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, judged by their own words, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16; 1 Kings 20:40). It could even be that the Lord cites the condemnatory words of the rejected uttered during their lifetimes and leaves these as their condemnation. Woe, therefore, to he or she who has said unrepentantly that they don't want to be in the Kingdom if brother x or sister y are going to be there. "He that keeps his mouth keeps his life; but he that opens wide his lips [in this life] shall have destruction" at judgment day (Prov. 13:3). The link between the final verdict and the words we use today is that clear. See on 21:43.

The words by which men shall be condemned are clear from the context- the words of blasphemy against Jesus, making Him the supreme agent of Satan rather than of God. But this is not to say that a general principle is not also being demonstrated. Words reflect the inner man, the Lord has taught- and so they are a fair index for judgment. This cuts right through the idea that we can harbour evil thoughts and yet cover them in nicespeak. The culture of nicespeak lays revealed for what it is- the Lord is saying that ultimately, our words *will* at some point reflect our thoughts. The whole section began with the explanation in :24,25 that the Jews "said" but Jesus "knew their thoughts". I suggested in the commentary there that perhaps they never actually spoke those words out loud. It is these thoughts for which by which we shall be judged.

The idea of being "justified" by our words at first sight it could seem that this contradicts Paul's argument for justification by grace alone- and not by the steel willed control of our words. But Romans 1-8 is a unit, and the teaching about justification by grace is on the basis that those in Christ are in a status, "in Christ", under grace- and in that status, the Spirit of God is at work in the human minds of all those who are in that status. And the Lord has made clear here that the words He will judge are those which are a direct reflection of the human heart or spirit.

12:38 *Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying: Teacher*- It would seem these were a different group of Pharisees to those with whom the Lord was in engagement earlier in the chapter; they address Him as "Master". They appear at least to be trying a more subtle approach than the previous group. Mk. 3:22 notes that this group had come from Jerusalem.

We would see a sign from you- The context of the chapter makes it clear that the Lord had been clearly doing signs / miracles. So maybe the emphasis is on *we*. They were maybe claiming that they personally had not been present when the signs were done, and now they wanted to see one. But Lk. 11:16 adds the detail that they sought a "sign *from Heaven*". This continues the issue under debate; the Pharisees accepted that Jesus was doing signs / miracles, but they considered them to be from 'Satan'; the Lord has responded by saying that His good works show He is a good man working on God's behalf, and that they would be called to account at the last day for their blasphemy. But it seems this other group of Pharisees continue in the blasphemous position- their response is to assume that the earlier miracles were signs from 'Satan', but now they give the Lord a chance to do a sign / miracle from God ("Heaven"). They repeated this request later (Mt. 16:1), and again the Lord answered them with "the sign of the prophet Jonah". It's not necessarily wrong to require a sign- Gideon's example comes to mind. The disciples themselves asked for a sign (Mt. 24:3), and the Lord answered them to the effect that there would be "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" (Mt. 24:30). "In" Heaven can mean 'by the instrumentality of [Heaven]'. The similarity of words and concepts is so close that there must be some continuity in meaning. It could be that the sign of the Son of Man given by Heaven in the last days is the sign of Jonah- the successful preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the resurrection from the dead.

12:39 *But he answered and said to them: An evil and adulterous generation*- The Lord may have in mind female adultery, alluding to the Old Testament passages which liken Israel to an adulterous wife. The parallel is between self-righteous Jewish society of the first century and sexually immoral but penitent Nineveh of previous centuries.

Seeks after a sign, and there shall no sign be given it- The idea could be 'no *further* sign', as if the Lord was saying that He would do no further dramatic miracles to seek to persuade the Pharisees. In this case, the allusion would be to the Egyptians not believing the signs given them (Ex. 4:9), resulting in their final destruction. Unbelieving Israel are no better than Egypt / the world, and will "be condemned with the world". Note that here as often we have to read in an ellipsis: 'No *more* sign'. For He had been doing signs / miracles in abundance. Or perhaps, seeing that He did continue doing miracles: 'No sign *greater than* [that of Jonah]'.

Except the sign of Jonah the prophet- The 'resurrected' Jonah was a type of the Lord- and he was a 'sign' to the Ninevites presumably in that he still bore in his body the marks of a man who had been three days within a fish. It could be that the fish beached itself, and vomited Jonah out of its stomach in its death throes (this is how beached whales meet their end). In this case, the fish would have drawn the attention of the local population, as would have the man with bleached hair and strange skin who walked away from it. We too as witnesses of Christ will have something about us that is unintentionally striking in the eyes of those with whom we mix. There was no human chance that Jonah would be listened to when he came to preach judgment against Nineveh. Some guy standing on the edge of town, saying 'You're all gonna be destroyed'. People would have laughed, ignored him, or told him to shut up. But there was something about him that was gripping and arresting. He was living proof that the judgment of God is real, and that His mercy is just as real. Presumably Jonah must have said far more than "Nineveh is going to be destroyed".

It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have borne in his body the marks of his experience for all to see, as our Lord did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them- so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that " the judge stands before the door". What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

12:40 *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*- Matthew's Gospel doesn't seem to teach a literal 72 hours for Jesus in the grave. But a 'day' can mean 'part of a day'- as in 1 Kings

20:29; Esther 4:16-5:1. The term is surely used to highlight the connection with Jonah's experience.

As Jonah was three days in the whale and then came up out of it to preach to the Gentiles, so the Lord would be three days in the grave and then would rise- as a sign to the Jews. But how was His resurrection a sign to them, seeing they never saw His risen body? Yet the Lord's reasoning demands that His resurrection be a sign to them, just as tangible as the re-appearance of the drowned Jonah. But, the Jews never saw Him after the resurrection...? The resolution must be that in the preaching of the risen Jesus by those in Him, it was as if the Jews saw Him, risen and standing as a sign before them, every bit as real as the Jonah who emerged from the whale after three days.

12:41 *The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall*- Again we must read in an ellipsis, '[the people of] this generation'. For individuals and not entire generations will be judged. 'Standing up' is possibly an allusion to the resurrection of the responsible at the last day, but more likely the figure is of a judge arising in judgment to state the verdict; which in this case, is condemnation. The Lord in :27 has spoken of how the children of the Jews would judge those Jews in the last day. The Lord clearly seems to envisage the judgment process as having a public dimension to it. The fact one person was spiritually responsive, given a similar or harder set of circumstances than what another has had who did not respond, will therefore as it were be the judgment of the person who didn't respond. It clearly won't be merely an awards ceremony nor a yes / no decision, but rather will context and precedent from others be taken into account. 'If *they* responded and *you* did not, given similar circumstances, then *they* will condemn *you*'- that seems to be the Lord's reasoning.

Condemn it- The truly righteous among the remnant "shall tread down the wicked... (as) ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). "The wicked" are those of Malachi 3:18 and 4:1 - the unspiritual element amongst the latter-day Jewish 'remnant' in Jerusalem. This implies that in some way the spiritual Jews acceptable to Jesus will mete out judgment on the rejected ones. Perhaps in similar fashion the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the judgment, and we will judge Angels (1 Cor. 6:3). In this way the righteous remnant shall " discern (judge) between the righteous and the wicked" (Malachi 3:18). The men of Nineveh will condemn first century Israel, just as the folly of the rejected will be made manifest unto all men (2 Tim. 3:9). This is not so as to simply humiliate the rejected. It is so that the faithful *learn* something too. This was all foreshadowed in the way that Israel experienced their judgments in the sight of the nations, so that God's principles would be taught even to the Gentile world (Ez. 5:8,15). Indeed, the idea of God executing judgment on His people *in the sight* of others is quite common

(e.g. Ez. 5:8; 16:41). But we can learn the principles of God's judgments right now, from His word.

For they repented- The Lord is going to soon claim that initially the people had responded to John's message- the demon had been as it were cast out and the house of Israel left swept and cleaned (:43,44). But both John and Jesus appealed for repentance, in the very same words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). But they had not really repented; they had responded to a religious message but not really repented. And the challenge comes down to us- as to whether our repentance, along with any spiritual act, is indeed the real thing or a mere appearance.

At the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, one greater than Jonah is here!- This effectively is a noun, referring to "the preaching" as in the message of Jonah. What he preached was judgment to come, and the Ninevites repented on hearing it. The Lord was teaching not only judgment to come, but was making specific the call to repentance implicit within that message, and urging people to accept God's grace. Hence those who heard Him were even more guilty before the Ninevites. Jonah's preaching occurred *after* he had been three days within the whale; after the Lord had been three days in the earth, He too would preach mightily, through the ministry of those 'in Him' who were effectively His representatives and appealed on His behalf. But He reasons as if that appeal was already being made- as if in essence He had already passed through the cross and resurrection. This is not the only time He reasons in this way; in proclaiming Himself Lord, the serpent lifted up on the pole, the One who had already "overcome the world", He reasoned as if the successful outcome of His death had already occurred. Such was His faith that He would come forth triumphant.

12:42 *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment*- "Rise up" translates *egeiro* whereas "rise up" in :41 translates *anistemi*. The Ninevites will "rise in judgment", as a judge arises to pronounce a verdict; whereas the Queen of the South arises "in *the* judgment", with the article. The difference may be because the Queen of the South is being portrayed as being resurrected along with the people of the Lord's generation. The reference is perhaps more to resurrection than to arising in judgment.

With this generation and shall condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, one greater than Solomon is here!- If Sheba is at the very end of 'the earth', we have another confirmation that the 'earth' or land in Scripture often refers to the land promised to Abraham, and not the entire planet. The point is that she made a huge effort to come to hear Divine truth, whereas Christ as "the wisdom of God" stood before their eyes and they refused to believe and repent. The parallel is between the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites, who repented. We may be able to infer that she likewise

repented upon hearing Solomon's wisdom. The whole theme in this section is of the need to make an abiding repentance upon hearing God's Truth as spoken by His Son.

12:43 *When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none-* The ministry of the Lord Jesus was a follow up to that of John the Baptist, and that theme is never far from us in Matthew's Gospel. The unclean spirit was cast out of Israel due to their surface level response to John's preaching- this was the sweeping of the house. But it returned and that generation became more evil than before. This lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth.

Demons supposedly didn't like water (as in Mt. 8:28-34). Again we find the Lord using the language of the day without correcting it. The reference is also to the Jews going into the wilderness to hear John's preaching.

The Lord has just given an invitation to come to *Him* and find "rest" (Mt. 11:28 s.w.). Hebrews may allude here when suggesting that Moses and Joshua could not give Israel "rest", only Messiah could (Heb. 4:8-10). John's work gave Israel a desire for this "rest" and pointed them to Jesus as the One who could give it- but they were refusing to take it. And so the (parabolic) unclean spirit was returning to the house of Israel and would make them worse than before.

12:44 *Then it says: I will return-* The Greek word is elsewhere translated to convert (Mt. 13:15). Israel's rejection of Jesus was effectively a re-conversion away from John's message. The same word is used of how John was to convert Israel to their God (Lk. 1:16,17).

To my house from which I came out- The same word is used thrice about that generation going out into the wilderness to hear John (Mt. 11:7-9).

And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order- The only other usage of the word "swept" is in the Lord's self-description of His 'sweeping' the house of Israel in order to find the lost (Lk. 15:8). The house of Israel had been swept- but the nation had not been 'found' because they would not come to Jesus in repentance.

12:45 *Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation-* "State" is an addition from the translators. "The last" was the state of condemnation which that generation ended up in. The Lord's comments that the first would be "last" (Mt. 20:16) could therefore be taken as a reference to the final condemnation of the Jewish religious leadership, "the first".

However, “the last”, the *eschatos*, could refer to their status at the judgment of the last day. But the essence of judgment is now, and the Lord saw them as already in that state. It “*is* worse” and yet thus ‘it *shall* be’ for that generation.

12:46 *While he was yet speaking to the crowds*- The same word for "speaking" is used later in the verse, in reporting that His mother and brothers wished to talk / speak with Him. The impression is given that He was talking, but they wanted to talk to Him rather than to listen.

His mother and his relatives stood outside, seeking to speak to him- Mt. 12:46-50 five times repeats the phrase “his mother and his brethren”, as if to link her with them. In the parallel Mk. 3:21,31-35 we read of how “his own” family thought He was crazy and came to talk to Him. Then we read that it was His mother and brothers who demanded an audience with Him, perhaps linking Mary with her other children. Their cynicism of Jesus, their lack of perception of Him, came to influence her- for He effectively rebuffs her special claims upon Him by saying that His mother and brethren are all who hear God’s word. Clearly the brothers, who didn’t believe in Jesus (Jn. 7:5) influenced her. When He speaks of how His real family are those who hear the word of God and do it, the Lord is alluding to Dt. 33:9, where we have the commendation of Levi for refusing to recognize his apostate brethren at the time of the golden calf: “Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren… for they [Levi] have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant”. The last sentence is the essence of the Lord’s saying that His true family are those who keep God’s word and do it. The strong implication of the allusion is that the Lord felt that His mother and brethren had committed some kind of apostasy.

12:47 *And someone said to him: Look, your mother and your relatives wait outside, wanting to speak to you*- Note how in the parallel Mk. 3:32 we read that “thy mother and brethren seek for thee”, and in Mk. 1:37 the same word occurred: “all men seek for thee"; and also in Lk. 2:45, of how Mary sought for Jesus. The similarity is such that the intention may be to show us how Mary had been influenced by the world's perception of Him. And we too can be influenced by the world’s light hearted view of the Lord of glory. It’s so easy to allow their patterns of language use to lead us into blaspheming, taking His Name in vain, seeing His religion as just a hobby, a social activity… In passing, it was not that the Lord was insensitive or discounted her. It is in Mt. 12:46 that Mary wanted to speak with Him, and presumably she did- but then He goes to His home town, back to where she had come from (Mt. 13:54), as if He did in fact pay her attention.

12:48 *But he answered and said to him that told him: Who is my mother? And who are my relatives?*- These terms are repeated three times in :48-50. In a fiercely family based society, such radical redefinition of family

was remarkable, and the Lord was labouring His radical point lest there be any misunderstanding. He was creating a new family, based around hearing and doing His Father's will; there was a new Father, God, and those who did His will were His children. The nature of the scene portrayed here seems to suggest that in His case, as in so many others afterwards, the new spiritual family was separate from the family of origin; for they were here outside the house. And we must bear in mind that 'house' meant not only a building but a family. This gives new meaning to the way that Paul and James (especially James) so love to address their brethren as "my brothers" (James 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 5:10,12). Their brethren in Christ were really their new family. And it should be the same for us. The divided state of the body of Christ today is surely a result of over-familiar, over-privileged believers failing to grasp the wonder of the fact that others have come into the family by conversion into Christ. In believing communities comprised of first generation converts, there is generally a far greater sense of brotherhood.

12:49 *And he stretched out his hand towards his disciples, and said: Behold, my mother and my relatives!*- Another mark of an eyewitness account is found in this reference to His stretching out His hand. Given the loss of family many had experienced, this visual image would've remained in their memories, to be drawn upon in the hard times of rejection by family of origin. The Greek *epi* translated "toward" could strictly mean 'over'- as if the disciples were sitting near to Him. For it was they, rather than the general audience, whom He knew were doing the Father's will.

The Lord implied that those who did God’s will were closer to Him than His physical mother or sister or brother (Mt. 12:48-50). It has been observed that “in a kinship-oriented society like Israel, it must have been startling for people to hear of a bond that was even deeper than that of the natural family”. And so it is in many parts of the world today.

12:50 *For whoever shall please my Father who is in heaven*- Or, "Do the will of"- another allusion back to the crunch line of the Sermon on the Mount, that the true community would be comprised of those who did the will of the Father in Heaven. The Lord spoke of Himself as 'doing the will' of the Father, supremely in His death on the cross. Heb. 10:7,9 speaks of the Son 'doing the will' of God in dying on the cross, and the passage then goes on to appeal to us likewise to do that same will (Heb. 10:36). And it is God who will work in us through the Spirit to empower us to do that will- if we ourselves so wish (Heb. 13:21).

He is my brother and sister and mother- The very fact the Lord calls us brethren in Mt. 12:50 the Hebrew writer saw as proof of Christ's humanity (= Heb. 2:11).

CHAPTER 13

13:1 *On that day*- This is programmatic to our understanding of chapter 13. The preceding chapter 12 has recorded how the Lord now changes His position regarding the Jews. Instead of the positive tone of the Sermon on the Mount and the hopeful appeal to Israel, from now on in Matthew there is much talk of condemnation to come, of Israel's rejection of the Gospel, and of how they were an adulterous generation for whom judgment was reserved. From now on, the Lord started using parables- hence the shock of the disciples and their question 'Why parables?' immediately after He had finished the sower parable (:10). And He spoke in parables exactly so that from now on, the masses would *not* understand. The mission of John had been largely unsuccessful, despite the good initial response. The Jewish religious leaders and the hopes for an immediate Kingdom in this world had lead Israel to reject the message, and their last state would be now worse than the first. The parable of the sower speaks of seed which initially grew (Israel's response to John's message) and then went wrong.

Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea side- He has just spoken of how the house of Israel is being re-inhabited by seven evil spirits. The suggestion could be that He was now dissociating Himself from the house of Israel and was going to the sea of Gentiles.

13:2 *And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood on the beach*- The Gospel records give more information about the day on which Christ told the sower parable than concerning almost any other in his ministry, with the exception of the crucifixion (compare Mt.12:22-13:23; Lk.11:27; Mk.4:10). Various types of people heard his words; the immediate context in Mt.13:2 is that "great multitudes were gathered together unto him". The parable of the differing types of ground which were for the most part unresponsive to the seed therefore refer to the various reception given to Christ's sowing when he first "went forth to sow" in his ministry.

"Gathered together" is the Greek *sunago* from whence 'synagogue'. The idea is that there in the open air, on the sea shore, and *not* in a building, was the synagogue- with the Lord as rabbi, sitting in a fishing boat to teach whilst the audience *stood* instead of sitting (as they did in a Jewish synagogue, James 2:2,3). The whole scene is a radical inversion of orthodox Jewish values and culture. The true synagogue was now in the open air, and beyond the imagination, frames and culture of orthodox religion.

In Mark we read that Jesus “entered in to a ship, and sat in the sea” (Mk. 4:1). All else was irrelevant- even the boat He was in. The focus is so

zoomed in on the person of Jesus. And Paul in his more 'academic' approach sees Jesus as the very core of the whole cosmos, the reason for everything in the whole of existence. Of course He didn't literally sit in the sea. But this is how it would have appeared to a spectator sitting on the grassy hillside, hearing Jesus' voice clearly from a great distance because of the natural amphitheatre provided by the topography. In this case, the Spirit adopts this perspective in order to invite us to take our place on that same hillside, as it were, beholding the Lord Jesus in the middle distance, looking as if He were sitting in the sea. Perhaps the record is implying that listeners were so transfixed by the words and person of Jesus that they stopped seeing the boat and only saw Jesus, giving the picture of a magnetic man with gripping words sitting in the sea teaching a spellbound audience. There's another example of this kind of thing in Jud. 4:5: "The mountains melted ['flowed', AV mg.]" – to a distant onlooker, the water flowing down the mountains gave the impression that they themselves were melting; not, of course, that they actually were.

13:3 *And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying*- The Lord in chapter 12 seems to have concluded that the contemporary generation was wicked and bound for condemnation; they had rejected John's message after having initially responded to it, and had rejected Him. This is now the first time that we read in Matthew of the use of "parables", and it seems to be in direct context with what He has said to Israelite society at the end of chapter 12. He is now speaking to them in this form so that they will be confirmed in their disbelief. The Kingdom principles which He had so clearly expressed in the Sermon on the Mount now become "mysteries" of the Kingdom (:11); instead of the Kingdom which could then have been established had Israel accepted Jesus as Messiah, the Kingdom principles would work quietly from within until such time as the Kingdom were to be politically established at a far future date. No longer do we read of the Kingdom coming 'near' and being 'heralded'. And the themes of most of His subsequent parables in Matthew include Israel's rejection of the Gospel. He spoke *things* to them, but in parables. This of itself suggests that He used parables so that people would *not* understand, as is made explicit in :11,12. His parables were not, therefore, simple stories with an obvious meaning. They may appear that way to us who have some understanding of their interpretation, but that was clearly not how they were understood by most of the initial audience. Even if they thought they understood them, it's made clear in :11 and :12 that they didn't. The change in style is due to His conclusion that that generation were condemned and had refused John's ministry and therefore Christ's message. From now onwards He would not be giving them any more- He was cloaking the message in parables, and explaining them only to the minority who had properly responded.

The chiasmic structure of Matthew 13 has been observed by several

expositors, and it makes the sowing of the weeds by “the enemy” the central point of the entire presentation; the point is, that Israel initial response to the Gospel preached by John had been destroyed by a conscious program to stop the message being accepted, operated by the Jewish enemy / satan:
Sower and the Soils (vv. 1-9)
Question by Disciples/Answer by Jesus (Understanding) (vv. 10-17)
Interpretation of the Sower and the Soils (vv. 18—23)
Tares (vv. 24—30)
Mustard Seed (vv. 31—32)
Leavening Process (v. 33)
Fulfilment of Prophecy (vv. 34—35)
Interpretation of the Tares (vv. 36—43)
Hidden Treasure (v. 44)
Pearl Merchant (vv. 45—46)
Dragnet (vv. 47—48)
Interpretation of the Dragnet (vv. 49—50)
Question by Jesus/Answer by the Disciples (Understanding) (v. 51)
Householder (v. 52)

Listen, the sower went out to sow- The Lord’s teaching in 12:43 that the Jews had not responded to John the Baptist lays the basis for the parable of the sower, which was told the same day (13:1)- the seed initially experienced some growth, but then the 'evil one', the Jewish system, stunted that growth. Who is the sower? The preacher, or the Lord Jesus? Some Greek texts read “*a* sower” (followed by the AV), others “*the* sower” (cp. the Diaglott). Perhaps the Lord said both: ‘A sower, the sower, went out...’. Surely the sower is the Lord Jesus, but in *our* work of witness we are *His* witnesses. For we represent Him to the world. This is why “the Spirit (the Lord the Spirit, Jesus) and the bride (the ecclesia) say, Come”; ours is a united witness with Him.

"Went out" is the same Greek word has just been used in :1 to describe how Jesus had 'gone forth' out of the house to preach by the lakeshore. Although multitudes were there listening, the Lord knew that only a few would be good ground for the word. The word is several times used of the Lord 'going forth' to teach, and four times He uses it about His 'going forth' to hire workers for His harvest (Mt. 20:1,3,5,6). The 'sowing' of the word was therefore not merely a placing of ideas and theology in the minds of men, but in practice it was (and is) a call to go out and work, to harvest others for the Kingdom. The Lord 'came forth' in order to preach (Mk. 1:38 s.w. "... that I may preach there... for *therefore came I forth*"). Note that He didn't 'come forth' from Heaven as a pre-existent person; rather Matthew begins his Gospel by using the word about how the Lord 'came forth' from Bethlehem, His birthplace (Mt. 2:6). John's Gospel records the Lord as saying that He 'came forth' from God (Jn. 16:28 etc.),

but this was in a spiritual sense; this is John's spiritual equivalent of Matthew's statement that He came forth from Bethlehem.

The condemned man in the parable of Mt. 25:24-26 complained that the Lord expected to reap where He had not sown. But the parable of the sower makes it clear that the Lord sows, even fanatically, everywhere. We perhaps would've reminded the man of the Lord's parable and His unceasing work of sowing, and reasoned 'That's not true!'. But this isn't the Lord's style. He takes people where they are and uses their own words and reasonings as if they are true- and shows by an altogether higher level of reasoning that they are not true. This explains His approach to the issue of demons. Matthew doesn't record that the Lord made a big issue about the seed- Luke's account records this: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed..." (Lk. 8:5). This appears to state the obvious- a sower sows seed. But "his seed" can also mean 'the seed of Him'. There is an obvious connection with the great Messianic promises to the Jewish fathers about their "seed". The seed is God's word, but it is also effectively 'Jesus'. For He personally is the essence of the Gospel message. This parable of the types of ground is explaining to the disciples why the majority of Israel were failing to accept Him, and thus had rejected the ministry and message of John.

13:4 *And as he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side*- The Greek *hodos* means simply 'the way'. It is the very word used about John the Baptist seeking to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus (Mt. 3:3). If Israel had responded as envisaged in the Isaiah 40 passage which speaks of this, then the way or road would have been prepared and the glory of Yahweh would have travelled over it to establish God's visible Kingdom in Jerusalem. On one hand, the fact the sower sowed even on the 'way' is an element of unreality in the parable which simply points to the extreme enthusiasm of this sower, casting the seed onto all types of human personality, including those who appear hopeless cases. The seed of God's word would have made the rough way smooth for the King of glory to ride over to Zion. But instead the seed was despised and even condemned, trampled underfoot - an idiom meaning it was despised and even condemned. And then the birds came and took it away altogether. The way was not prepared by response to the seed because of the Jewish leadership stopping others responding. We note the usage of the same word to describe how some despised individuals sitting in 'the way' were in fact persuaded to respond to the Kingdom invitation (Mt. 22:9,10); Bartimaeus was likewise sitting in the way [s.w.] and responded, following Jesus "in the way" (Mk.10:46,52). The 'way [side]' could have responded to the seed- but it didn't. Because men came and trampled it under foot, and the birds came and took it away. It wasn't as if there was no chance at all that it could have responded.

And the birds came- Lk. 8:5 adds that first of all, the seed was "trodden down" before the birds came. The impression is given of something, someone or a group of people hindering the growth of the seed- and that is a theme explaining the failure of the seed to grow in the other cases of 'bad ground'. The Lord has in mind the damage done to the growth of the word in the hearts of first century Israel by a group of people- and those people were the Jewish religious leaders. On a wider level, it's true that in practice it is the attitudes and pressures from others, conscious and unconscious, which stops people today from responding to God's word beyond an initial interest. Birds were symbolically understood in Judaism as the Gentiles- and the Lord is applying the symbol to the very religious leaders of Judaism, whom He saw as Gentiles in that they were consciously trying to stop people responding to the seed of God's word of Christ. And yet His later parable in the same chapter speaks of the birds coming and dwelling in the branches of His Kingdom (Mt. 13:32). I see in this His hope, even His fantasy, that His worst opponents would come into His Kingdom. And some did- for some Pharisees did later repent and were baptized, even Saul. And this is a great example to us, of wishing the very best, the Kingdom, for even the worst.

The picture of fowls coming down to take away the seed is firmly rooted in a host of Old Testament passages which speak of fowls descending on apostate Israel (Is.18:6; Jer.7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20). These birds taking away the seed are interpreted as "the wicked one" (the Biblical devil) 'catching away' the word. There must be a thought connection here with Jesus' comment that from him who would not understand the sower parable "shall be *taken away* even that he hath" (Mt.13:12). Those who would not make the mental effort to grapple with Christ's parable had what understanding they did have snatched away by the Jewish devil. "The wicked one" responsible for this easily connects with "the devil" of the parable of the tares which follows; this parable has frequently been interpreted with reference to Jewish false teachers of the first century. "The wicked one... catcheth away" the seed/word, as the Jewish wolf "catcheth" the sheep (Mt.13:19; Jn.10:12). This association of the first century Jewish system with the wolf/ wild beast/ devil/ wicked one is probably continued by some of the beasts of Revelation having a similar Jewish application in the first century.

Lk. 8:5 literally translated speaks of "birds of Heaven". The fowls taking away the unfruitful seed is the first of a number of connections with the true vine parable of Jn. 15, where the ideas of Divine husbandry and fruitfulness due to the word recur. In Jn. 15:2 the fruitless branch is taken away by God; in the sower parable, the birds remove the fruitless plant. The conclusion is that God sends 'birds' of various kinds to remove the spiritual deadwood from His ecclesia. It is in this sense that false

teaching (e.g. the Judaist "fowls" of the first century) is allowed by God. parable of the sower connects the Devil with the fowls which take away the Word from potential converts, stopping their spiritual growth. This would aptly fit the Judaizers who were leading the young ecclesias away from the word, and the Jews who "shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men... neither suffer ye them that are entering (young converts) to go in" (Mt. 23:13). The Devil takes away the word of the Kingdom, "lest they should believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12).

And devoured it- The same word is used of how the Pharisees "devour[ed] widows houses" (Mt. 23:14) and of how the Judaist fifth column within the fledgling church 'devoured' some (Gal. 5:15). The sober fact is that we can be barriers to the response of others to the word of Jesus, the word which is *the* seed- Jesus. One lesson we can take from the parable is that spiritual growth involves resisting other influences in order to respond to the Lord Jesus personally through His word.

13:5 *And others fell upon the rocky places where they had not much earth*- The Greek *petrodes* is a form of *petra*. The Lord had taught that the wise man who heard and did His sayings developed his spiritual house upon a *petra*, a rock (Mt. 7:24). And of course Peter was the *petra* upon which the church would be built (Mt. 16:18). So again we see that it was not impossible for the seed on the rock to prosper. The problem was that some who began their growth upon rocks stopped growing because of persecution and tribulation (:21)- which in the first instance was from the Jews.

And immediately- There is nothing wrong with this, indeed this is as response to the word should be; and Matthew often notes the immediacy of response. When you perceive an opportunity to do the Lord's service, *respond immediately*. See it as another opportunity for "redeeming the time". This is a major Biblical theme. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples *immediately* left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies). There is a marked theme in the NT of men and women hearing the Gospel and *immediately* responding by accepting baptism. In this spirit Cornelius immediately sent for Peter (Acts 10:33), and the Philippian jailer was immediately baptized, even though there were many other things to think about that night (Acts 16:33). Joseph was twice told in dreams to "arise" and take the child Jesus to another country. Both times he "arose" in the morning and just did it, leaving all he had, responding immediately (Mt. 2:13,14,20,21). Paul and Luke immediately went to preach in Macedonia after seeing the

inviting vision (Acts 16:10); Paul "straightway" preached Christ after receiving his vision of preaching commission (Acts 9:20). Indeed, the records of the Lord's ministry are shot through (in Mark especially) with words like "immediately", "straightway", "forthwith", "as soon as...". He was a man of immediate response, Yahweh's servant *par excellence*. He dismissed the man who would fain follow Him after he had buried his father, i.e. who wanted to wait some years until his father's death and then set out in earnest on the Christian life. The Lord's point was that we must immediately respond to the call to live and preach Him, with none of the delay and hesitancy to total commitment which masquerades as careful planning. Note how the Lord told another parable in which He characterized those not worthy of Him as those who thought they had valid reason to delay their response to the call (Lk. 14:16-20). They didn't turn Him down, they just thought He would understand if they delayed. But He is a demanding Lord, in some ways. What He seeks is an immediacy of response. If we have this in the daily calls to service in this life, we will likewise respond immediately to the knowledge that 'He's back' (Lk. 12:36, cp. the wise virgins going immediately, whilst the others delayed). And whether we respond immediately or not will be the litmus test as to whether our life's spirituality was worth anything or not. All this is not to say that we should rush off in hot-headed enthusiasm, crushing the work and systematic efforts of other brethren and committees under foot. But when we see the need, when we catch the vision of service, let's not hesitate in our response, dilly dallying until we are left with simply a host of good intentions swimming around in our brain cells. Instead, let's appreciate that one aspect of the seed in good soil was that there was an *immediacy of response* to the word, a joyful and speedy 'springing up' in response (Mk. 4:5).

They sprang up- The idea is that they germinated. The seed of the Gospel began to grow- the multitudes had begun to respond to John's message. The same word is used in the next verse to describe how the sun then 'sprung up'. After response to the word begins, there will be trouble and testing. Just as Israel's Red Sea baptism was immediately followed by tribulation and testing. The sun arising and withering the seed is a symbol of tribulation arising in the life of the believer (Mk. 4:6). But the sun arising is also a clear symbol of the day of the Lord's return. Thus whenever we encounter tribulation, our response to it is in some sense a preview of our response to the Lord's coming in judgment. Trials and reproofs from God are Him "entering with thee into judgment", here and now (Job 22:4).

Because they had no deepness of earth- John perhaps explains the 'depth' in his account of the woman at the well. The salvation in Christ was brought from the 'deep' [s.w.] well (Jn. 4:11). These people had only a

surface level interest and did not really grasp the deep reality of Christ and His work.

13:6 *And when the sun had risen*- See on 13:5 *sprung up*.

They were scorched- Literally, burnt. John the Baptist had presented a powerful logic- either baptism by fire by the Jesus whom he preached, or being burnt up with [figurative] fire at the last day (Mt. 3:10-12). The Lord clearly has that in mind here- those who had refused John's message about Him were even now burnt up, for judgment in its essence begins now, according to our response to the word of Christ.

And because they had no root, they withered away- The same word used by the Lord about how Israel were the fig tree who had once had promise of fruit (in their initial response to John) but was now withered (Mt. 21:19,20). Those who initially accept Christ but do not abide in Him are likewise "withered" (Jn. 15:6). John's emphasis upon 'abiding' in Christ likely has reference to the need to accept John's message about Christ and abide in it, rather than wandering off and back to Judaism. Both James and Peter seem to allude to this point of the parable in their teaching that the word of God stands forever, whereas flesh withers away (James 1:11; 1 Pet. 1:24). As we will note on 13:22, the seed is to become the person. Those who do not wither are those who have the seed within them, the power of eternal life which endures. "Because they had no root, they withered away" (Mt. 13:6) is alluded to in Jn. 15:6 concerning the branches of the vine withering as a result of God's word not abiding in them. The connection between the plants of the sower parable and the branches of the vine is further evidence that the sower parable mainly concerns the response to the word of those *within* the ecclesia.

13:7 *And others fell upon the thorns*- This of itself didn't mean that growth was impossible. The Lord's next parable makes that clear- the good sees brings forth fruit, clearly alluding to the 'good ground' of the sower parable, *despite* being surrounded by "tares", weeds, within which category are thorns (13:26). The point of the later parable would therefore be to make the point that fruit can be brought forth *despite* a spiritual environment in which we have to grow and fruit next to thorns. "Thorns" were defined by the Lord as *people*- those who do not bring forth good fruit, even though they may claim to be true believers (Mt. 7:16). Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of 'thorns' as people ("He that bears thorns... is rejected"). The later interpretation in :22 is that the thorns are the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of "this world"- and yet these abstract things operate upon the believer through persons, through

people devoted to them. For we all 'are' the principles which we live by; and our example and influence upon others is more significant than we realize. Those people in the first instance were Jewish people in first century Palestinian society who strangled the growth of the seed in the hearts of people by their attitudes and the pressure of their example. We note that "this world" in the first instance referred to the *aion* around Jesus- which was the Jewish world. Especially in John's Gospel the phrase carries that meaning in most occurrences.

And the thorns grew up and choked them- The next parable explains that both good and bad seed 'spring / grow up' (:26); the point is that the good seed continues to bear fruit despite this. They intertwined with the roots of the crop beneath the ground, and later kept light from reaching the plants. Again the suggestion is that there was a specific group of people [the Jewish religious leadership] who were damaging the growth of seed which had begun to grow [in response to the preaching of John]. And yet the interpretation is that the thorns represent the worry of the world, and wealth (:22). We can understand these things in the context of the Jews loving wealth and the whole system of Judaism, the Jewish 'world', making them worry about appearances to the point that the real seed of the word grows no more. The same can be seen in legalistic forms of Christianity today, where appearance to others becomes all important and thereby real spirituality goes out of the window.

"Choked" is again language more relevant to persons. The same word is found in the Lord's description of the man who initially accepted forgiveness from God and then went and 'choked' or 'took by the throat' his brother (Mt. 18:28). That man who was initially forgiven and then finally condemned speaks in the primary context of those who responded to John's message of forgiveness, but ended up condemned because of their aggression towards their brother- the Christians. Again, those who choked the response of others to the word are the members of Jewish society. The parable of the sower can be interpreted as fulfilling every time we hear the word sown in us. Thus some seed is "choked with cares" (Lk. 8:14)- exactly the same words used about Martha being "cumbered" with her domestic duties so that she didn't hear the Lord's word at that time (Lk. 10:40). We bring various attitudes of mind- stony, receptive, cumbered etc.- to the word each time we hear it. And it is our attitude to it which determines our response to it.

13:8 *And others fell upon the good ground and yielded fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty*- The next parable is clearly related to this parable of the sower. There, the same word is used for the "good seed", the "children of the Kingdom" (13:24,38). The ground refers to the hearts of people; but in the parable of the good seed, the seed itself is paralleled with the person. The word had become flesh in them, as it was

in the Lord Himself (Jn. 1:14). John the Baptist had preached about the need to be a "good" plant bearing good fruit, or else face condemnation (Mt. 3:10, and repeated by the Lord in Mt. 7:17-19). The appeal was for the audience to be as John intended, to follow where his teaching led. They had initially accepted that teaching but had failed to follow where it led. And this was to be their condemnation.

Mk.4:8 adds the significant detail that it was the *fruit* that the plant yielded which "sprung up and increased". The picture is of a plant bringing forth seeds which themselves germinate into separate plants and bear fruit. This can be interpreted in at least two ways:

1) True spiritual development in our lives is a cumulative upward spiral; successfully developing spiritual fruit leads to developing yet more.

2) The new plants which come out of our fruit refer to our converts, both from the world and those within the ecclesia whom we help to yield spiritual fruit. There is another link here with the parable of the vine bearing fruit: "I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should *go* and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:8,16). This connects with Christ's command to them to *go* into the world preaching the Gospel and thereby making converts. In this sense our spiritual fruiting is partly through our bringing others to glorify God through the development of a God-like character. It is in this context of using the word for preaching and personal spiritual development that we receive the glorious encouragement "that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he (will) give it you" (Jn. 15:7,16). Every believer who truly strives to bring forth fruit to God's glory, both in preaching to others and in personal character development, will find this promise constantly true.

God works like this because He is prepared to accept that different people will make something different of His Truth. The parable of the sower shows this in that the "good ground" brings forth 30, 60 or 100 fold. Some believers respond three times as actively to the Gospel as others; yet they will all be accepted at the end. I see a connection between this parable and Christ's words to the rich, righteous young man: '"If thou wilt be *perfect*..." sell what you've got; and then you'll receive *100 fold* in this life, and eternal life in the Kingdom' (Mt. 19:12,21). Presumably, that man at that time was (say) in the 30 or 60 fold category. Christ wanted him in the 100 fold category. But if that man didn't sell all that he had, it doesn't necessarily mean that Christ would have rejected him ultimately. In this context, He says: " Many that are first (in this life) will be last (least- in the Kingdom); and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:30). Those who don't sell all that they have will be in the Kingdom, but least in it. The poor of his world, rich in faith, will be great in the Kingdom (James 2:5). We need to ask ourselves whether we really accept the parable of the sower; whether we are strong enough to let another brother be weak, to accept that even if he's in the 30 fold category, he's still acceptable to his Lord, just living on a different level. Indeed, it isn't for us to go very deeply at all into how exactly Christ sees others; because we can't know.

The point to note is that God wants us to rise up the levels of commitment. Paul was persuaded that the Romans were "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge", but he prayed they would be filled yet further (Rom. 15:13,14).

I have shown in the commentary above that growth was in fact possible on each type of ground, and the New Testament contains examples of where this happened. I suggest that in fact there are only three types of ground- the way side, the rocky and the thorny. These three types of ground would then match the three types of good ground- which gave 30,60 and 100 fold increase. Putting the gospel records together, the Lord's description of the good ground contains elements of the initially good response from the three bad types of ground. The good ground represents a good state of mind- for the ground is clearly to be understood as the heart of those receiving the word. This category therefore refers to those on the three other types of ground who *did* respond to the end, who overcame the pressures upon them not to respond further. This also removes the moral problem which is otherwise presented- in that it would appear that the seed of the word is spread, but the good ground people can do nothing else but respond, and the bad ground people can do nothing but not ultimately respond because of who they are by nature and where they are situated in life. The good ground category had to 'keep the word' (Lk. 8:15)- they didn't let men tread it underfoot nor birds take it away. Given their position in life, even by the wayside, they still responded by keeping the word. There was an element of choice and human effort required- rather than some categories being inevitably unable to keep the word because of their location in life and surrounding influences upon them. In this we see huge encouragement in our cluttered lives today, subject as they are to negative spiritual influences which at times seem too strong to resist. And we are further encouraged in our own sowing of the seed- nobody is incapable of response, from the deepest room in a strict Moslem family to sharing a one room apartment in Europe surrounded by materialistic, unGodly people.

Jeremias claims that a yield of tenfold was considered good in first century Palestine (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Scribner's, 1972) p. 150). Even if that is somewhat conservative, the point is that the seed on good ground yielded amazingly. This element of unreality speaks of how each person in the 'good ground' category will experience growth and blessing out of proportion to their tiny spiritual beginnings. The parable of the mustard seed makes the same point. Amazing harvests is the language of the Messianic Kingdom, both Biblically and in Judaism. The beginning of the Kingdom experience is in our response to God's word in this life. The one hundred fold response is

huge- but then so is the loss. It’s as if the Lord is trying to encourage the disciples after the conclusions drawn about the general failure of the ministry of John- and therefore the Lord’s also. His point is that despite all the failure, *some* will respond, and their response and blessing will be so huge that this more than counterbalances all the failure of others. If we can bring one person towards eternity, this is so wonderful that all the rejection of our message is worthwhile.

Note how the three types of wasted seed and poor ground are matched by three types of response on the good ground. This feature of triads (features occurring in threes) may not necessarily have any meaning, but it may simply be part of a structure designed to aid memorization- which was the initial usage of the Gospel records.

In Palestine, sowing precedes ploughing. The sower sows on the path which the villagers have beaten over the stubble, since he intends to plough up the path with the rest of the field. He sows amongst thorns because they too will be ploughed in. And it has been suggested that the rocky ground was land with underlying limestone which barely shows above the surface. Even if some preaching work appears not to bear fruit, this shouldn't discourage us from the essentially outgoing spirit we should have in spreading the word far and wide. Many of the parables have an element of unreality about them, designed to focus our attention on a vital aspect of teaching. The sower parable has 75% of the seed sowed on bad ground, due to the almost fanatic way the sower throws the seed so far and wide, evidently without too much attention to whether it lands on responsive soil or not. His emphasis was clearly on broadcasting the seed far and wide. We should desire to see the spread of God’s ways, His Truth, His will, the knowledge of the real Christ, to as many as possible. The word / seed which fell into good ground produced fruit. This connects with Jn. 15:5,7, which says that the branches of the vine bring forth fruit through the word abiding in them. Likewise the good ground keeps the word and continually brings forth fruit (Lk. 8:15). It is common for us to learn something from the word, apply it for a few days, and then forget it. Yet surely the implication is that if our hearts are truly open to the word, it will have permanent effects upon us, if the word abides in us. For this reason it is necessary to pray at least daily for our minds to be good ground for the word, and to retain what we already comprehend. Those on the good ground who hear and understand in Mt. 13:23 are described as those who hear and keep the word (Lk. 8:16). True understanding of the word's teaching is therefore related to an ongoing practical application of it. We may read a human book and understand it at the moment of reading; understanding God's word is quite a different concept. Truly understanding it means keeping it in our heart and therefore in our lives. The seed fell on good ground, "sprang up, and bare fruit"; indeed, it kept

on bearing fruit (Lk. 8:8,15). The plant being sown was therefore a repeating crop. True response to the word will lead to wave after wave of spiritual progression. Again, we see that the sower parable is describing an ongoing response to the word- it keeps on being sown by the believer keeping the word, and fruit is continuously brought forth.

13:9 *He that has ears, let him hear*- Seeing that the next verses show the Lord considered Israel generally to no longer have ears to hear (see on :1 also), this would seem an appeal to the disciples to perceive what He is saying, even though the majority of Israel cannot. Therefore He asks them later to "*Hear* the parable" (:18)- for He knows they do have ears to hear. But even they had to make a conscious effort to hear- those with ears are asked to hear. Understanding, in the sense Jesus uses the idea, doesn't come naturally but requires effort.

Luke adds: "As he said these things, he cried: He that has ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8). The Lord so wanted their response. "As he said these things, he *cried*, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Lk. 8:8 RV; Jn. 7:37). The very muscles of the Lords face, His body language, would have reflected an earnest, *burning* care and compassion. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost; He put His whole personality into the task. And we beseech men "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV). We are to be *His* face to this world and to our brethren. With raised eyebrows, lines showing in our forehead, one eye half closed… our body language should reflect the depth of our concern for others. Having spoken of how our attitudes to God's word will elicit from Him varying responses, the Lord *cried*, loudly, "he that hath ears to hear, *let him hear*" (Lk. 8:8). There is then the sickening anti-climax of the next verse, where the disciples ask Him whatever His parable meant. One senses a moment of silence in which the Lord composed Himself and camouflaged the pain of His disappointment; and then His essential hopefulness returns in Lk. 8:10: "Unto you it is given (potentially, anyway) to know (understand) the mysteries (parables) of the Kingdom of God". There is a fine point of translation in Lk. 8:8 which needs to be appreciated: "*As* he said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (ASV and Greek). It seems that the Lord was 'throwing out' this challenge several times, as He spoke the parable. As the sower sows seed, so the Lord was challenging His hearers to decide what type of ground they were, as they heard the parable.

13:10 *And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables?*- This question is understandable if this was the first parable the Lord spoke; see on :1. They were taken aback by His changed method of teaching, probably noticing that the eagerly listening

multitudes had not properly understood it, overhearing all kinds of wild guesses at what the Lord was maybe driving at.

13:11 *And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven*- The things which God has prepared for those who love Him, things which the natural eye has not seen but which are revealed unto us by the Spirit, relate to our redemption in Christ, rather than the wonders of the future political Kingdom (because Mt. 13:11; 16:17 = 1 Cor. 2:9,10). The context of 1 Cor. 2 and the allusions to Isaiah there demand the same interpretation.

But to them it is not given- Here we see the element of predestination- understanding is "given". Paul in Romans speaks of such predestination as the supreme evidence of our salvation by grace. One example of the Lord Jesus' emphasis on our salvation being through grace rather than our works is found in the way the parables teach that our acceptance is to some degree dependent on our predestination. Thus the parable of the types of ground suggests that we are good or bad ground at the time the seed is first sown; the fish are good or bad at the time they first enter the net; the wise virgins take the oil with them from the start of their vigil. I would suggest that this is not just part of the story. It was evidently within the Lord's ability to construct stories which featured the idea of bad seed or fish etc. changing to good, and vice versa. But He didn't; indeed, His emphasis seems to have been on the idea of predestination. This isn't to decry the effort for spirituality which we must make; but His stress of the predestination factor is surely to remind us of the degree to which our calling and salvation is by pure grace.
The Lord's grace to His men is reflected in Mark's record of how the twelve were confused by the Lord's parables. He responds that He speaks in parables so that "them that are without" would not understand; but His followers would, He implies, "know the mystery of the Kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables". And yet it's immediately apparent that the disciples were equally confused by the parables. We sense the Lord's frustration with this: "Know ye not this parable? How then will ye know all parables?"- i.e. 'If you don't understand this parable, it means you won't understand any of them, which makes you equal with the crowd of those outside of Me, whom I'm seeking to leave confused'. And we note how straight away Mark notes, perhaps in sadness and yet marvel at the Lord's grace: "But without a parable spake he not unto them [the disciples]: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples" (Mk. 4:10-13,34). Mark, or Peter writing through Mark, could look back in wonder. They the supposed disciples, learners, of the Lord Jesus had been as dumb as the crowd; but by grace alone the Lord had privately explained the parables to them. And our understanding of true Bible teaching is likewise a gift of

grace, when we are every bit as obtuse as the people in darkness who surround us. The phrase "them that are without" (Mk. 4:11) seems to have stuck with Paul; he uses it five times. Perhaps he saw that a characteristic of the believers, those separated from the world of darkness, was that they understood the parables; and this would explain Paul's frequent allusion to them, stressing as he does the need to appreciate their power. But those “without” in His other teaching clearly refer to those rejected at the judgment, who will stand “without” begging for admission to the Kingdom (Lk. 13:25; Rev. 20:15). But those ‘without’ in Mk. 4:11 are those who chose not to understand the Lord’s teaching, for whom it’s all parables, fascinating perhaps, but confusing, unclear, and not something they are really bothered to understand. This connection of thought doesn’t mean that intellectual clarity of understanding alone decides who will be, indeed who is, within or without of the Kingdom. But it is all the same true that the Kingdom life both now and in the future requires us to understand so that we might believe and live and be as the Lord requires.

13:12 *For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance*- The faithful do not get the blessing solely by their own effort, but through the gift of God. The context requires we understand this as 'having' the ability to hear the Lord's words and practically 'understand' them (:9). Mt. 13:12 speaks of what a man has, whereas Lk. 8:18 AV mg. more precisely speaks of what a man *thinks* he has. Matthew’s record adopts a more human perspective. This Greek word for "abundance" is used about the 'abundance' which characterizes the life of the believer. But the 'abundance' is not of material things, but of understanding of and thereby relationship with the Lord.

But whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has- The language is difficult, but makes good sense if we understand ‘what a man has’ as referring to what that generation had due to responding to John’s preaching; but because they had not followed where it led, they were left with nothing. The ideas are similar to the parable the Lord had just given of the demon being thrown out of the house of Israel by John the Baptist, but then returning. The language is arrestingly and purposefully strange. How can a man who has nothing have what he has taken away from him? All is clearer once we accept the initial context as being the Lord's commentary upon Israel's initial response to John the Baptist, and subsequent rejection of his ministry insofar as they rejected Jesus as Messiah. What they had once had- an initial response to the word sown- was now being taken away from them. This likewise explains the language of the next verse- that it was by the process of seeing and hearing that they became blind and deaf. It was their initial seeing and

hearing of John's message which had made them now totally blind and deaf- because they had not responded to it.

13:13 *Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing, they see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand-* See on 13:12 *even what he has*. It was their initial seeing and hearing of John the Baptist which became the basis of their subsequent total blindness and deafness to Jesus. If the word sown isn't responded to further, or only partially so, then there remains only a hardening. We must respond, and immediately- and be led wherever the word leads us.

13:14 *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which said: By hearing you shall hear and shall in no wise understand, and seeing you shall see and shall in no wise perceive-* Jesus spoke the parable of the sower so that the Jews "by hearing... shall hear, and... not understand" (Mt.13:14), which is quoting from Is. 6:9,10 concerning Israel hearing the preaching of Jesus during his ministry. This would explain the present tenses in Mk.4:14-20: "These *are* they by the way side... these *are* they... which *are* sown...". That prophecy evidently had fulfilment at Isaiah's time; the point is thereby established that prophecy can have multiple fulfilments.

13:15 *For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest-* Here we have explained why some people don't get it, will not understand. It's not that they are mentally inadequate. The Lord's reason is because they realize, albeit subconsciously, that if they do, then the process will lead to repentance, to change, and thereby to spiritual healing. And people don't want to change, to allow God's claim over every part of their lives. And so they choose not to understand. So often we marvel that despite God's Truth being so simple, so few understand it. That is now no mystery- for the Lord's explanation here is that it's because they don't actually want to change. It's why so many prefer a life of apparently searching for Truth, rather than accepting the most obvious Truth, which is Christ. It's why despite all the miracles and teaching and personality of the Lord Jesus, so few wanted to accept Him as Messiah. This would've been of great relevance to the disciples and first century preachers who first heard this, for whom Israel's rejection of Jesus would've been so hard to understand.

They should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and repent, so that I should heal them- True conversion

involves understanding and perceiving, and not merely hearing doctrinal truth (Mt. 13:15). True understanding is a seeking for God, a doing good; hence those who sin have no true knowledge as they ought to have, whatever their theoretical understanding (Ps. 14:2-4). But we can nominally believe the Gospel, 'understand' it in an intellectual sense, and bring forth no fruit to perfection (Mt. 13:15 cp. 23)- not perceiving the power of the Gospel. Understanding and perceiving the meaning of the parables would result in conversion, repentance and forgiveness (Mk. 4:12). Moses persevered because he *understood*. "Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law" (Ps. 119:35) is one of many links in David's thought between understanding and obedience.

The Lord spoke of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). There are levels of conversion. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:32), the Lord told Peter. Yet Peter was converted already! The Lord had spoken of conversion as really seeing, really hearing, really understanding, and commented that the disciples (including Peter) had reached this point (Mt. 13:15,16). But he also told them that they needed to be converted and become as children, knowing they knew nothing as they ought to know (Mt. 18:3). Quite simply, there are different levels of conversion. Baptism isn't conversion: it's a beginning, not an end.

13:16 *But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear*- The disciples were so slow to perceive. And yet the Lord could (perhaps gently and smilingly) tell them: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see" (Mt. 13:16). Yet He later reprimanded them for being so slow of heart to perceive… Surely He was speaking of the potential which He recognized in them; a potential which He rejoiced to see. Of course we are blind and spiritually obtuse. And yet the New Testament speaks of us as if our blindness has been lifted. In the same way as our Lord sees us as if we are perfect, without blemish, as if we are already in the Kingdom, so he sees us as if we are without blindness. This is how he treated the disciples. He spoke of them as "seeing", i.e. understanding (Mt. 13:16; Lk. 10:23). But frequently he despaired at their lack of spiritual perception, i.e. their blindness. Yahweh describes His servant Israel, both natural and spiritual, as a blind servant: "Who is blind but my servant?... who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:19). There is a real paradox here: a blind servant, or slave. What master would keep a blind servant? Only a master who truly loved him, and kept him on as his servant by pure grace. Yet this useless blind servant was God's servant and messenger- even though the blind were

not acceptable as servants or sacrifices of God under the Law (Lev. 21:18,22)! God uses His spiritually blind servant people to proclaim His message to the world. The disciples, still blind to the call of the Gentiles, were sent out to preach to the whole world! As the Lord was the light of those that sat in darkness (Mt. 4:16), so Paul writes as if all the believers are likewise (Rom. 2:19). Paul points out the humility which we should therefore have in our preaching: there are none that truly understand, that really see; we are all blind. And yet we are "a guide of the blind, a light to them that sit in darkness" (Rom. 2:19). Therefore we ought to help the blind with an appropriate sense of our own blindness.

13:17 *For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which you see and saw them not, and to hear the things which you hear and heard them not*- These men, the Lord said, wanted to understand but didn't. But He has just explained that lack of understanding is rooted in a subconscious refusal to understand. He is using 'seeing' here in the sense of understanding, rather than physically seeing. I therefore wonder whether He is speaking with irony- of the Jewish false prophets and supposedly 'righteous ones'. They claimed to desire understanding, but they never attained to it.

13:18 *Hear then the parable of the sower*- The Lord has defined 'hearing' earlier in the context as something which requires conscious effort. He is therefore issuing a command here, rather than speaking a meaningless preface to the interpretation.

13:19- see on 13:38.
When anyone hears the word of the kingdom- “The word”, the “word of the Kingdom”, “the Gospel”, “the word of God” are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both “the word of God” (Lk. 8:11-15) and “the word of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is *about* God, just as the “word of the Kingdom” means the word which *is about* the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. "The seed is the word of God" (Lk.8:11), i.e. the word of the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt.13:19). The parable gives the impression that the ground was in a certain condition when the seed was first sown; there seems no hint at the possibility of changing the ground, although we will see later that there is a sense in which this is possible. The stony ground, for example, is in that state as soon as the seed lands upon it. It seems that Jesus is showing us how God looks down upon the preaching of the Gospel to various people, seeing that He speaks about things which are future as if they are already (Rom. 4:17). He knows the type of ground which each of us will ultimately be. Therefore, as far as

God is concerned, we are good ground, or whatever, at the time of our first encounter with the Gospel, even if we are initially stony or thistle-filled. The seed is the word (Lk. 8:11); and "the word" doesn't necessarily mean the whole Bible (although the whole Bible is of course inspired). The phrase specifically means the word of the power of the Gospel, by which we were ushered into spiritual being. And *this* is what brings forth fruit, through our 'patient' and continued response to it. We were born again, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God... and this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:23,25). Time and again the New Testament uses "the word of God" or "the word of the Lord (Jesus)" as shorthand for the preaching of the basic Gospel. *This* is the seed, this is the source of new life, this is what can lead to new character and behaviour in us. James speaks of being "doers of the word" (1:22,25), using the same word as in the parable of the sower, there translated 'to bring forth fruit'. Note that "the word of God" in the NT often refers specifically to the Gospel. James foresaw the possibility of hearing the word of the Gospel but not doing it, not bringing forth what those basic doctrines imply. He foresees how we can admire it as a vain man seeing his reflection in a mirror. We are not to be "forgetful hearers" of the word of the basics, the "implanted word" (1:21 RV- another reference to the sower parable). We aren't to learn the Gospel and then forget those doctrines. We are to be doers of them.

And understands it not- The Lord has just made clear that not understanding Him is a conscious, wilful intellectual act; and people shut their eyes so that they will not understand, lest it demand too much from them personally (:15). The wayside category are not, therefore, merely predestined not to understand. It's not that they were just in the wrong place, exposed to the wrong teachings and religious culture, and therefore they did not understand. For anyone who hears the word or seed of Christ, refusal to understand it is a conscious choice. It may not appear like that, but the Lord has said in :15 that it is. By 'understanding', the Lord means the understanding which brings forth fruit. He is here redefining 'understanding the word', making it refer to something fruitful in practice. He spoke against a religious culture in which spirituality was seen in terms of being a microscopic student of the Old Testament and word by word, verse by verse, coming to the right theological interpretation. Many of us were raised in a similar environment. And the Lord here is redefining 'understanding the word' away from the sense of 'correct exposition' towards 'responding faithfully in practice, bringing forth fruit'. The bad ground, therefore, involved an element of choice to be like that. We showed on :4 that there were 'wayside' persons who *did* respond; our location in terms of culture, environment, psychology etc. is *not* an inevitable barrier to responding to the word which we hear. This proves that sin, in its various manifestations as a 'devil', can be resisted through an understanding of the word. *When* there

was no understanding of the word, *then* the devil came. Likewise 1 Jn. 5:18-20 teaches that those who are born again by a true understanding of the word are not even touched by the "wicked one". Mere knowledge of the word will not necessarily stop the spiritual temptations; the word must be hid in the heart to stop sin (Ps.119:11); not just left on the surface of the soil. Those on the good ground both hear *and* understand it (Mt.13:23), corresponding in the first instance to those who heard the parables and understood them. There is no doubt that a degree of intellectual effort is required to understand the word, not least the parables. The Jews generally did not "hear with their ears"- they did not respond or recognize the basic message of the word, let alone go on to understand it.

In his justification of confusing the Jews through the sower parable, Jesus twice lamented that they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:13,14). He was basically saying that the Jews were the bad ground in the parable; the fowls snatched away the seed because they did not *understand* (Mt. 13:19). By contrast, those on the good ground *did* understand (Mt. 13:23). Those who heard the word "and anon with joy receiveth it" only to later fall away (Mt. 13:20,21) approximate to the Jews who initially rejoiced at the word of Christ preached by John and later Jesus himself (Jn. 5:35). "The care of this world" (Mt. 13:22) must primarily refer to the Jewish world.

Then comes the evil one- Note that the parable was spoken the same day as the discourses of chapter 12- see 13:1. The entire context of the parable and the preceding chapter is that it was the Jewish world system which hindered people from further responding to the seed / word about Jesus which they had first heard from John the Baptist. As I showed at length in *The Real Devil*, the Jewish system is frequently described as the 'satan' or adversary of the early church. By 'the wicked one', the Lord's audience would've understood 'satan'; and the Lord is redefining their view of 'satan' as being not so much the Gentiles or some cosmic being, as their own religious elders and system.

And snatches away- The same word had recently been used by the Lord in Mt. 11:12 about how the violent take away the Kingdom. I suggested in the commentary there that this is possible to understand as referring to the Jewish leaders stopping people entering the Kingdom of Jesus. In this case, "the wicked one" is again identified as the Jews. The word is also used about the wolf 'catching away' the sheep (Jn. 10:12)- and in the same passage in John 10, it is the wolf who kills Jesus in His mortal combat with him in order to save the rest of the sheep. Clearly the wolf there refers to the Jewish leaders who ravaged the flock, indeed John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which speaks of Israel's priesthood as

responsible for the scattering of the sheep. Mt. 13:19 describes the evil one taking away the word out of our heart. However can we resist that evil one? Paul had his eye on this question in 2 Thess. 3:1,3, where he speaks of the word being *with them*, and also of the Lord keeping them from the evil one. Paul knew that the Lord (Jesus) will help us in keeping the word in our hearts, if we allow him to; he saw that the power of God is greater than our low nature.

That which was sown in his heart- Clearly the types of ground represent types of heart or mind. In addition to the elements of unreality in the parables, there are other features which shout out for our attention. Often details are omitted which we would expect to see merely as part of the story. For example, the parable of the ten girls says nothing at all about the bride; the bridegroom alone is focused upon, along with the bridesmaids. Where's the bride in the story? Surely the point is that in the story, the bridesmaids are treated as the bride; this is the wonder of the whole thing, that we as mere bridesmaids are in fact the bride herself. Another example would be the way in which the sower's presence is not really explained. No reference is made to the importance of rain or ploughing in making the seed grow. The preacher is unimportant; we are mere voices, as was John the Baptist. But it is the type of ground we are which is so all important; and the type of ground refers to the type of heart we have (Mt. 13:19). The state of the human heart is what is so crucial. Yet another example is in the way that there is no explanation for exactly why the tenants of the vineyard so hate the owner and kill His Son. This teaches of the irrational hatred the Jews had towards the Father and Son. And why would the owner send His Son, when so clearly the other servants had been abused? Why not just use force against them? Here again we see reflected the inevitable grace of the Father in sending the Son to be the Saviour of the Jewish world.

This is he that was sown by the way side- The person is put for the seed. Because according to a person's attitude to the word of Christ, so he is.

13:20 *And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that hears the word and immediately with joy receives it*- So long as he 'believes for a while' (Lk.). Belief and joy are therefore paralleled. The later references to our joy *remaining* unto the end of our spiritual path surely allude here (Jn. 15:11; 16:22; Acts 20:24; Heb. 3:6). Note how in Jn. 16:22 the joy of the disciples could be taken from them by those who took Christ from them; another hint that the persecution which choked the joy came from the Jews, who were those who took Christ from them. Joy and faith are linked many times in the New Testament; we must ask whether we really have the joy which is the proof of real faith.

13:21 *Yet he does not have root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles*- The house built on sand was destroyed by a flood, an oft used type of the second coming and day of judgment. The equivalent in the sower parable is "when the sun was up... they were scattered" (Mt. 13:6). The sun is a symbol of both Christ's return and also of "tribulation or persecution! (Mt. 13:21). It seems that Jesus is teaching that our response to the word now is in effect our judgment seat; if we do not properly grow by it, in time of trial (the sun rising) we will spiritually die. Therefore when "the sun of righteousness" arises (Mal. 4:2) at the day of judgment, we will be "scorched" or 'burnt up' (Gk.). There are other examples of where a man's attitude to God's word in this life indicates his position at judgment day (e.g. Acts 13:46). In the same way as we call upon a reserve of word-developed spirituality in time of trial (the "moisture" of the parable), so we will at judgment day. When Paul spoke of how we *must* go through tribulation to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22), perhaps he was alluding to the parable of the sower, where the Lord taught that when, and not "if" tribulation arises (Mt. 13:21). Paul knew that it *must* come because of the way the Lord had worded the interpretation of the parable.

It is quite possible that our Lord's sad prophecy of the disciples being offended because of having to identify with his sufferings looked back to this parable, concerning those who impulsively respond to the word in joy, but are offended because they have no deep root (Mk. 4:17 = Mk. 14:27; Mt. 26:31). The fact that the disciples became good ground after this encourages us that we can change the type of ground which we are on initially receiving the seed.

13:22 *And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that hears the word, and the*- One of the ineffable sadnesses of Paul's life must have been to see his converts falling away. Yet he seems to have comforted himself by seeing their defection in terms of the sower parable. Many a missionary has been brought close to that parable for the same reason. It supplies an explanation, an answer, a comfort, as 'Friends one by one depart (some we saw as pillars to our own faith, those we thought would always be there) / Lonely and sad our heart'. Thus Paul saw Demas as a seed among thorns (Mt. 13:22 = 2 Tim. 4:10); he saw Elymas as a tare (Mt. 13:38 = Acts 13:10); and he pleads with the Romans not to slip into the tare category (Mt. 13:41 Gk. = Rom. 14:13).

Care of the world- In our age as never before, given more possibilities and knowledge of possible futures and what could go wrong, we have as never before the temptation to be full of such care. The same word is

used in Lk. 21:34 about the "cares" which will be a feature of the last days- both of AD70 and today. But in the first instance, the 'world' in view was the Jewish world.

And the deceitfulness of riches- There are not a few Bible passages which confirm this view of materialism, as *the* besetting temptation of every human soul, and which confirm that therefore our attitude to materialism, serving God or mammon, is the litmus test of our spirituality. The parable of the sower teaches that for those who begin well in the Truth, who don't fall away immediately or get discouraged by persecution, "the deceitfulness of riches... the cares and pleasures of this life" will be their temptation. I would have expected the Lord to either speak in more general terms about the flesh, or to reel off a list of common vices. But instead He focuses on the desire for wealth as the real problem. The love of wealth is the root of *all* evil behaviour (1 Tim. 6:10). And I would go further, and suggest that so many of the excuses we hear which relate to "I haven't got time" (for reading, preaching, meeting, writing...) are related to this desire for material improvement. The desire for advancement takes an iron grip on a man's soul. As we move through life, our thinking is concerned with prices, with possibilities, with schemings... what *ought* to be the surpassingly dominating aspect of our life, the Son of God and His Truth, takes a poor second place. The connection between the desire for riches and the devil (our nature) is powerful. The devil is a deceiver. And 'riches' is also a deceiver (Mt. 13:22). That we know for sure. The desire for material things, for the false security of bank balances, the excuse that we are allowing ourselves to be so preoccupied for the sake of our families, the idea that we are only human beings and so God will let us be dominated by these worries... all this is the deception of the flesh. God *does* remember that we are dust, and yes, of course we *must* provide for our own, some thought (but not *anxious* thought) must be given to tomorrow (Mt. 6:25,31,34). But these facts must never make us push God's Truth into *second* place. The lilies of the field are fed and dressed by God without anxiously worrying about it. Israel on their wilderness journey were miraculously provided with food *and clothing,* surely to prefigure God's basic material care of His spiritual Israel of later years. David, all his life long, never saw the seed of the righteous begging bread (Ps. 37:25).

Choke the word- Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Mt. 13:22 says that riches choke a man's response to the word. 1 Tim. 6:9 warns that those who *want to be rich* are choked by their *desire* for riches. Likewise Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because

"riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

And he becomes unfruitful- The types of ground represent the hearts of various categories of people. We expect to read that *the seed* becomes unfruitful. But the seed never does, it never of itself loses its power and life. The seed of the word, of Jesus who is *the* seed, becomes the person. The word is to be made flesh in us as it was to perfection in the Lord (Jn. 1:14). See on 13:6 *withered*. The word becoming unfruitful in Mt. 13:22 is matched by it yielding "no fruit" (Mk. 4:7) and no fruit being perfected in Lk. 8:14. The conclusion from this is that spiritual fruit which is developed but does not remain is not really fruit at all. There is the constant temptation for us to recognize just a bit of apparent 'growth' within us, and feel satisfied with it- rather than taking on board the concept of the word having a fullness of effect upon every part of our lives. Given the lesson of the thorns, there is no doubt that one must watch their friends even within the ecclesia. "Thorns and snares are in the way of the forward: he that doth keep (the Hebrew for "keep" is often used in Proverbs about keeping the word) his soul shall be far from them" (Prov. 22:5). The language of thorns must connect with the curse upon Eden; the ecclesia, the paradise of God, must always have its thorns in order to spiritually exercise Adam, the spiritual gardener. As our brother's keeper, we need to be aware that after conversion, a whole gamut of new temptations face the convert. *After* he has heard the word, he is choked with the cares, riches and pleasures (Lk. 8:14). Yet these things existed before he heard the word; the point is that they became new temptations after his response to the word. A concerted effort to understand, with Biblical guidance, the pressures upon new converts might help save a few more of the many which are being lost.

Thorns were symbolic of false teachers in the Old Testament ecclesia (Ez. 2:6; Is. 33:12-14). It is a repeated theme that thorns are devoured by fire (Ex. 22:6; Ps. 118:12; Ecc. 7:6; Is. 10:17), looking ahead to the destruction of all false elements of the ecclesia. The thorns easily equate with the tares of the next parable, which represent false teachers (primarily the Judaist infiltrators of the first century ecclesia). It would seem from this that some members of the ecclesia are never right with God, but exist purely for the spiritual trial of others; although it cannot be over-emphasized that it is quite wrong to attempt to label individuals as this 'thorn' element. Thus Jesus pointed out that grapes (the true Israel) and thorns can be apparently similar (Mt. 7:16), but "Ye shall know them by their *fruits*". The thorns of the sower parable and those they influenced

were "unfruitful". However, seeing that "the thorns sprang up *with it*" (Lk. 8:7), there was some genuine spiritual growth, matched by the appearance of this among the thorns too. Heb. 6:8 likewise speaks of the thorns as believers who grew up within the ecclesia. This indicates the dual-mindedness of those who only partially commit themselves to the word; knowledge like this should play an active part in our self-examination. Because the thorns outwardly look like true believers, having an outward appearance of spiritual growth even more zealous and strong than that of the plants which they choke, it is impossible to personally identify the "thorns"; but there can be no doubt that, according to the parable, they *must* be present among the ecclesia. The seed "fell *among* thorns" (Mt. 13:7), showing that this thorn category were already within the ecclesia when the person who was to be choked was converted. We have shown that Biblically the thorns are false teachers; yet Jesus interprets them as "the care (Gk. 'divisions'- the double mindedness of serving two masters) of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Mt.13:22). The conclusion to be drawn is that the false teachers are responsible for the new convert being choked by these things. Mk. 4:19 says that these lusts enter into the convert's heart. Therefore the thorns must influence the person's thinking, so that he follows after these things until "he becometh unfruitful". The Greek for "choked" is from a root meaning 'association, companionship'. Marshall's Interlinear renders the Greek text of Lk. 8:7 in keeping with this idea: "Growing up with the thorns choked it". Thus it is through close association with the thorn element already in the ecclesia, that the new convert who enters it is corrupted. We each have to ask 'What type of ground are we as an ecclesia? Do *I* have thorn elements to me...?'

13:23 *And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that hears the word and understands it*- "Accepts" (Mk. 4:20), "holds fast" (Lk. 8:15). In our present culture of anti-intellectualism, it can be overlooked that any real acceptance of a message, let alone holding onto it, must require a degree of 'understanding'. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. The background of the parable is that it was given the same day as the Lord's lament over the lack of response to John's message and therefore His own ministry (13:1). The very fact there is good ground, and three different types of it matching the three different types of failure, is therefore an encouragement to the disciples (and all) that God's word doesn't 'return void' but does ultimately achieve an end in some lives. Indeed it has even been suggested that the parable of the sower is a kind of *midrash* or interpretation of the Isaiah 55 passage about the word going forth and not returning void. Ultimately, despite

rejection, setbacks and only a minority responding- the work of the Kingdom will succeed. That is one aspect of the parable.

The parable of the sower concluded by lamenting that the Lord's general Jewish audience did *not* understand, and He spoke the parables knowing they wouldn't understand and would be confirmed in this. And He stressed that a feature of the good ground is that His message is understood. In this context, the Lord commends the disciples because they saw and heard, in the sense of understanding (Mt. 13:13,15,16,23). Yet so evidently they didn't understand. And yet the Lord was so thrilled with the fact they understood a very little that He counted them as the good ground that understood.

Who truly carries fruit and brings it forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty- Many of the Lord's parables had some oblique reference to Himself. The parable of the sower speaks of the type of ground which gave one hundred fold yield- and surely the Lord was thinking of Himself in this. And yet the whole point of the parable is that all who receive the Lord's word have the possibility of responding in this way. Or take the related parable of the mustard seed [=God's word of the Gospel] which grows up into a huge tree under which all the birds can find refuge (Mk. 4:31,32). This image is replete with allusion to Old Testament pictures of God's future Kingdom, and the growth of Messiah from a small twig into a great tree (Ez. 17:22). Here we see the power of the basic Gospel message- truly responded to, it can enable us to have a share in the very heights to which the Lord Jesus is exalted.

The parable of the sower leaves us begging the question: 'So how can we be good ground?'. Mark's record goes straight on to record that the Lord right then said that a candle is lit so as to publicly give light and not to be hidden (Mk. 4:21). He is speaking of how our conversion is in order to witness to others. But He says this in the context of being good ground. To respond to the word ourselves, our light must be spreading to all. The only way for the candle of our faith to burn is for it to be out in the open air. Hidden under the bucket of embarrassment or shyness or an inconsistent life, it will go out. We will lose our faith if we don't in some sense witness to it. Witnessing is in that sense for our benefit. When the disciples ask how ever they can accomplish the standards which the Lord set them, He replied by saying that a city set on a hill cannot be hid (Mt. 5:14). He meant that the open exhibition of the Truth by us will help us in the life of personal obedience to Him. We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22). In other words, the very reason why God has hidden the things of His word from the world and some aspects of them

from our brethren, is so that we can reveal them to them. The ecclesias, groups of believers, are lampstands (Rev. 2:5 cp. Ps. 18:28). We must give forth the light, not keep it under a bucket, letting laziness (under a bed) or worldly care (a bushel) distract us; because "there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested; neither was anything kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mk. 4:21,22).

Luke goes on to record the Lord's teaching about a candle. Burning brightly before others is therefore the way to be good ground. We are compared to a candle that is lit (cp. our baptism) *so that* it may give light to others (Lk. 8:16; 11:33); the woman (the Lord Jesus) lights a candle (He uses believers) to find his lost coin (through our efforts) (Lk. 15:8; this must be seen in the context of the other two references in Luke to lighting a candle). If we don't give light (God's word, Ps. 119:105) to others, we are a candle under a bucket, and therefore we will lose our faith, the flame will go out. So it's hard not to conclude that if we don't naturally give the light to others, we don't believe. The very nature of a lit candle is that it gives light; *all* candles do this, not just some. The Lord wants to use us as His candle, and He will arrange situations in life to enable this. Nothing is done secretly that will not then come to the light (Lk. 8:17 RV)- and therefore we should come to the light right now, living life in God's light and before His judgment (Jn. 3:20,21). This not only means we should not sin 'in secret', but more positively, we should feel and realize His constant affirmation of us for thoughts and actions which are invisible to others or for which we do not receive any thank. The Lord taught that either the 'devil' will "take away" the word from the rejected, or He will "take away" what He has given them at the last day (Lk. 8:12,17). In this sense, the word "abiding" in us is a foretaste of the day of judgment- if we don't let it abide, and the 'devil' of the world or our own humanity takes it away from us, then effectively such people are living out the condemnation process even in this life. "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it" (Lk. 8:21), refers back to His recent parable of the good seed that "did" the word which they heard (8:15). But surely that group of fascinated, surface-interested onlookers didn't all come into the good seed category, who held the word to the end, all their lives? He was so positive about others' faith.

13:24 *He set another parable before them, saying: The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field*- Potentially, even then, the field of the world had been given to the Lord Jesus.

13:25 *But while his men slept, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away*- The sense of "while" is supplied by the translators. It could just as well mean that *when* men slept- after the

death of the apostles? And yet the Lord commands His followers *not* to sleep, and Paul in 1 Thess. 5 repeats this. The implication could be that the sowing of the weeds was avoidable if the Lord's workers had been more attentive. Jesus so understands human weakness. But let's try to enter into the sense of shame and hurt which He must feel at our apathy; the shame is similar to the shame of the farmer who has tares growing in his field. Everyone sees it's the result of his workers sleeping instead of keeping the night watch as they should have done (Mt. 13:25). The Lord foresaw this; He saw that the ultimate harvest wouldn't be a good one. Even some that looked like "good seed" would be rejected (Mt. 8:12 cp. 13:38). Yet in this same context, Christ speaks of how the believer starts off as a tiny mustard seed, but in the Kingdom grows into a tree which will shelter others (Mt. 13:32). He saw *how* small are our spiritual beginnings compared to our position in the Kingdom. The least in the Kingdom will be spiritually greater than John the Baptist was in his mortal life (Mt. 11:11). The false teachers "crept in" just as a serpent creeps (Jude 4). The same group may have been in Christ's mind in His parable of the tares being sown in the field of the (Jewish) world by the Devil, *secretly* (cp. "false [Jewish] brethren unawares brought in", Gal. 2:4–6). In the parable of the sower, "the Devil" is defined as the enemy of Christ the sower / preacher of the Gospel – and His enemies initially were the Jews. These were the "tares" sown amongst the wheat which Christ had sowed, "things that offend" – and Paul warns of the Judaizers who caused *offences* and schisms to wreck the ecclesia (Rom. 16:17; 14:13; Mt.13:38,39,25,41). This is all confirmed by Jesus in Mt. 15:12–13 describing the Pharisees as plants "which My Heavenly Father hath not planted" which were to be rooted up at the judgment.

Mark's record speaks as if the *sower Himself* slept. The humility of the Lord Jesus is a reflection of the humility of God His Father. He spoke of Himself as the sower, who sleeps (in His death) and then works night and day (His present Heavenly labour for us) so that the seed should bring forth fruit- "He knows not how" (Mk. 4:27, with allusion to Ecc. 11:1,5,6). Despite all things having been revealed unto Him, and the Spirit immeasurably given to Him, He had the spiritual and intellectual humility to openly recognize that our spiritual growth and ultimate salvation is a mystery to Him. It was the Father alone who gave the increase. He forgot things at times, didn't understand absolutely everything (e.g. the date of His return, or the mystery of spiritual growth, Mk. 4:27), made a mistake when working as a carpenter, cut His finger. But He was never frustrated with Himself; He was happy being human, comfortable with His humanity.

13:26 *But when the plants sprang up and brought forth fruit, then the weeds appeared also*- See on :7. This is the "good ground" category of the previous parable. They were sown amongst thorns and yet all the

same, brought forth fruit. It may be that the Lord intends us to perceive that one mark of spiritual maturity is that once we start to bring forth fruit, we realize that we are surrounded by weeds / thorns. But we cannot for sure judge any given individual as being in that category.

13:27 *And the servants of the householder came and said to him: Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?-* To a Palestinian rural audience, the answer was obvious. Enemies sowing weeds amongst the wheat was a fairly common occurrence. The story is set up to make these servants seem somehow foolish for not suspecting the obvious explanation. In the first instance, the Lord is addressing the problem the disciples were having as to why there was such mixed response to the Gospel. He's gently trying to explain to them that surely it was obvious why there wasn't better response- there was, clearly enough, a systematic campaign orchestrated by the Jews to damage the harvest.

13:28- see on 15:14.
And he said to them: An enemy has done this! And the servants said to him: Then do you want us to go and gather them up?- The term is used several times in the parables of Matthew 13, and in the context it effectively means 'to judge'. The gathering process is the judgment- not only because the process of gathering and judgment will likely be in a split second in terms of time as we understand it, but because our attitude in the moment when we know 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who go immediately will be saved, and those who delay to prepare themselves will thereby show themselves unworthy. "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" (Mt. 13:28) shows Christ's knowledge that this would be the desire of His servants throughout the generations. If we take His teaching seriously, we must come to the conclusion that all of us have a desire to "help" our brethren by 'sorting out' the weaknesses which we see in them, but that there is the real possibility that often this desire is spiritually grotesque in God's eyes. According to the parable of the tares, we are very sure that we know who are the tares and who are the wheat. But we can't be as sure as we feel, is the Lord's message. Some we feel are obviously tares are actually wheat. And the sensitivity of Jesus foresaw this so accurately. There's a fascinating twist in this story that is exactly descriptive of our experience. The servants slept first of all, after the word was first sown, and only once the wheat and tares came to bear fruit did they pester the Master to let them root up the tares. This reference to bearing fruit must be read in the context of the preceding parable of the sower, which describes how the good ground bears fruit (Mt. 13: 26, 8). The implication is that the servants shouldn't have been sleeping first of all, thinking there wasn't really much to do in the field. And so it is a familiar pattern: conversion is followed by a period of feeling there isn't much to do, and then the

realization dawns that due to our own negligence in those early days there are some tares in the ecclesia. The desire to sort out the tares therefore comes some time *after* conversion. And on the overall level, there is another truism: the servants of Christ are keener to eradicate error than stop it in the first place. It's sad to see that there is almost a despising today of the warnings against 'the thin end of the wedge'; awareness of the possibility of apostasy is seen as somehow negative-exactly as the parable predicts. The parable implies that *if* a greater level of watchfulness was maintained by the servants, there wouldn't be the tares. But, as the Lord foresaw, we seem to lack this watchfulness, often under the guise of feeling that we must sort ourselves out rather than guard against apostasy being introduced. The sensitivity of Jesus constructed that parable with the aim of showing the thoughtful how deeply inappropriate is their desire to root up the tares. He clearly had in mind the prophecy of Himself in 2 Sam. 23:6,7: "The sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken by (human) hands: but the man that shall touch them (Christ) must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place (just outside Jerusalem) "where Christ was "fenced with iron". It isn't possible for us to uproot the tares because this can only possibly be done by the one who totally uprooted sin in Himself, dying to it on the cross. This association between Christ's right to judge and His victorious death is shown by the way the "tares" will be burnt in the same area as He was crucified in. Phil. 2:9-11 reasons along the same lines; because Christ died for us, He *therefore* has the right to have every knee bowing to Him at the judgment. On account of being "the Son of man" and yet also being our perfect Messiah, He has the right *therefore* to be judge (Jn. 5:27 cp. Dan. 7:13,14). The Lord understood all this; and to the thoughtful, those who would grasp His allusion to 2 Sam. 23, He was saying: 'If you think you can root up the tares, if you think you have that wisdom to identify the tares, you are really insulting the greatness of what I achieved on the cross. It's only on account of that that I have the ability and right to divide wheat from tares, sheep from goats'. See on 7:4.

That we go- The emphasis is surely on the “we”. They assumed that because they were the man’s servants, they were therefore also the reapers. The contrast drawn between the servants and the reapers was an element of unreality in the story. For farmers didn’t have a separate category of workers who were specifically “reapers”. But this householder did, and the element of unreality points to the fact that contrary to what we intuitively think, the work of reaping is *not* for us. There are others, the Angels, who will do this. And the other element of unreality is that the householder wanted the weeds to continue to grow, even though they would be taking away moisture and nutrients from the good seed. This is the way the Lord wishes for things in this life. Those who offend, who cause the righteous to stumble, will only be removed from them at the last day (:41). The preceding parable of the sower had featured a type of

ground where there were thorns who grew up and stopped the good seed from developing; but the point was that the 'good ground' category would still prosper *despite* growing next to weeds. Such was and is the power of God's word in Christ, that those who respond to it can still bring forth amazing yield *despite* the presence of the weeds next to them.

13:29 *But he said: No. Lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them*- The message is that we can rightly sense that there are pseudo plants within the field, but we can never actually define any one individual as being one of them. The parable of the wheat and weeds features another unlikely happening. Someone sows weed seeds on top of the wheat seeds. The farm workers who were sleeping aren't upbraided as we might expect. The weeds can't be uprooted because the roots are intertwined; and anyone walking into the field to remove them would trample the wheat. So how, therefore, can they be rooted up at the time of the harvest? It can only be by some super-human reapers- i.e. the Angels. It is totally and utterly beyond *us* to do the uprooting. And yet this obvious meaning has still not been perceived by many of us.

13:30 *Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of the harvest I will say to*- The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). There is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

The suggestion is that when the fruit is ready, then the harvest begins. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore variable; it depends upon the development of spiritual fruit by the last generation before His return.

The reapers- These are different to the 'servants' of :27. The implication is that we are the servants, and not the reapers. And yet the same word is used in Jn. 4:36-38 about how in preaching the Gospel, we are reaping people into the harvest of eternal life. As an exercise in Biblical exposition, this simply shows that a figure may be used in one context in an entirely different way, even with a completely opposite sense, to how

it is used in another usage. And in yet another sense, we as it were reap ourselves according to how we sowed in this life (Gal. 6:7-9). And yet we shall be reaped by the Angels in the actual judgment process; the connection perhaps shows that effectively, we judge ourselves.

Gather up the weeds first and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn- This detail is surely not merely incidental. The idea is that the wicked and righteous will be gathered together with others within their same category. Then, it will finally be clear who is who; they will be displayed together. There is the implication in the words of Christ to the angel/reapers that the unworthy will be destroyed together: "Gather together *first* the tares, and bind them in bundles (i.e. together) to burn them". "*First*" here may well mean 'most importantly' rather than first in terms of time. It will be our Lord's desire to get the miserable business of destroying wilful sinners over and done with as quickly as possible- a far cry from the orthodox belief that Jesus somehow revels in the punishment of sinners. He can then concentrate on the joy of having the wheat gathered (together) into His barn (Mt. 13:30).

All these parables end with the impression that the faithful are going to be of eternal use to others, providing food / salvation for them. The 100 fold increase of the good ground was to be eaten, the wheat turned into bread or sown again, the mustard seed tree gives shelter to others, etc. We are to develop a desire to do that for others in this life, so that we might eternally do it in reality.

13:31 *He set another parable before them, saying*- Bearing in mind the Lord's earlier explanation that He was speaking to the Jewish masses in parables so that they would not understand, I wonder if the "them" here refers specifically to the disciples.

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain- Gk. 'a kernel'. The element of unreality is that a farmer would not consciously sow one tiny seed in a field. But the Lord does this, knowing the potential power within that one tiny seed. He 'takes' this one tiny seed [in his palm, we are to imagine] out into the field and sows it. And the mustard bush was perceived as a weed, a wild bush, not a crop. But it grows into a tree, it grows far greater and more majestically than could ever be expected. Here again is the Lord's encouragement to His disillusioned preachers- the growth of the Gospel, rather like the unreal increase on the good ground, is out of all proportion to what it initially is. Preaching appears 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:18,21); that by sharing the Gospel with others, the vast majority of whom ultimately reject it, something so wonderful and eternal can really come. This parable thereby highlights the faith of the Father and Son, the sowers, that the word of the Kingdom really would survive and grow out

of all proportion to its beginnings. This was exactly the encouragement which the disciples needed to hear, disillusioned as they were by the pathetic response to John's ministry and the Lord's real spiritual demands upon people.

Of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field- The mustard seed becomes a tree so big that all the birds of the air can live in it (Mk. 4:32). But mustard trees aren't *this* big. Surely the point is that the small seed of the Gospel produces a quite out of proportion result- by reading literature, spotting a press advertisement, getting baptized... we will by grace become part of the Kingdom of God, and provide shelter to the nations of this world. This is the extraordinary power of the Gospel. This is how far it will take us, and the extent to which we can, through the Gospel, become saviours of men. See on 13:33. Each of the records of the great preaching commission in the Gospels ties in with earlier passages within the same Gospel record. Mark's "preach the gospel to every creature" is to be understood in the context of the Lord's prophecy that the seed of His Gospel would be sown by preaching, and would result in creatures of all kinds coming under its' shadow (Mk. 16:15 cp. 4:32). The extent of witness we make is our choice; and according to how well we do it, so the extent of the shadow of the Kingdom gives shelter to many kinds.

13:32 *Which indeed is smaller than all seeds*- Gk. *mikros*, the tiniest, the least. Mark adds that it was the tiniest of all seeds *in the earth* (Mk. 4:31). It was the tiniest seed known in the land- and the term often refers to the land promised to Abraham. It was the tiniest imaginable seed. And it would grow into the greatest imaginable tree. The point has been made that orchid and other seeds are actually smaller than mustard seeds (H. N. Moldenke and A.L. Moldenke, *Plants of the Bible* (Waltham, Mass.: Chronica Botanica Company, 1952) p.61). But the Bible is written from the perspective of its original hearers, it never claims to present global scientific truth, and the mustard seed was the smallest seed known to the Lord's audience.

But when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree- Not 'grows into' a tree. The tiniest seed was only supposed to grow into a bush, but this unusual seed 'became' a tree, *ginomai* carrying the sense of being 'caused to become'. This was another element of the unreal- a shrub became a tree. It is AV "The greatest"; but the mustard bush is not the greatest herb and it is far from the tallest tree. The emphasis is on the word "it"- when *this* particular tiny seed grows… The point is that this particular tiny seed had extraordinary growth. This on one hand speaks of the amazing growth experienced by the believer from the apparently tiny

beginnings of the Gospel. And yet the specific language of *the greatest* suggests the entire parable may refer to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate seed, tiny and despised, yet who grew to become the Kingdom of God under whose branches the Gentile world would find blessing. For 'the Kingdom' was a legitimate title for Jesus, the King of the Kingdom who embodied it in His very person (Lk. 17:21). If here the Lord (as elsewhere) is speaking parables to and about Himself, it would in this context be in encouraging others as to the huge extent of growth possible. For Jesus is the parade example of how something which began so small- an egg within the womb of a barefoot unmarried teenager- could become so great.

So that the birds of the sky come and lodge in its branches- Mark records that the Lord emphasized that the branches were "great", *megas* (Mk. 4:32). The *mikro* seed became *mega*; but the greatness of the tree was because of the greatness of the individual branches. A mustard bush doesn't have 'great' branches, but in this unreal story, it does have them. According to the Lord's parable of Jn. 15:5, the branches represented the disciples: "I am the vine, you are the branches". The total greatness of the Lord Jesus depends to some extent upon the degree to which we grow into great branches. The disciples were depressed at the lack of response to their message, and the failure of John's ministry in first century Palestine. The Lord is encouraging them personally that from their *mikro*, tiny beginnings, they would become great branches, and be able to provide shelter for the birds of the Gentiles; although the "birds" in the earlier parable of the sower were representative of the Jewish religious leaders. When the disciples later baptized priests and Pharisees, the Lord's ambitious vision began to come true.
There are a number of insights throughout the parables into how the Lord perceived His future Kingdom. Significantly, His emphasis in the parables of the Kingdom is upon our spiritual status then, rather than on the physical wonders which His reign will bring on the earth. He foresaw how although our faith is so puny now, as a mustard seed, we will be those who will be as a solid tree, a real place of refuge, to the nations of the Millennium (Mt. 13:31,32 = Ez. 17:23,24).

13:33 *He told them another parable: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast*- This continues the theme of the preceding parable; which was about a *man*, and now He tells a similar story balanced out with a *woman* as the central figure. Again the point is that from tiny beginnings, great influence comes. And as a note in how to perform Biblical exegesis, we should learn here that because yeast is used negatively in some Bible passages, it doesn't *always* have to require that meaning. The Gospel which we preach is likened to yeast- in itself a startling comparison- because it is through our humanity that we will

influence others, by being our real, human selves. Yet the woman mixing yeast is preparing a huge amount of bread, according to the specifications in Mt. 13:33. This is perhaps to show us that whilst our influence may be quiet and unseen, the quietest witness can have a huge influence. W.D. Davies quotes Pliny and the Mishnah, giving examples of the use of yeast as a *positive* symbol (W.D.Davies, *Matthew* (*op cit.*) p. 422).

Which a woman took and hid- The teaching of Jesus works quietly from within- that could be the sense. Just as the tiny seed of the Gospel produces huge results finally, so the yeast of the Gospel has disproportionate influence. But we must give full weight to the Lord's other teachings about hiddenness. We are to become a city set on a hill which *cannot* be hid (Mt. 5:14; our good works "cannot be hid", 1 Tim. 5:25); it is the rejected who hide the talent of the Gospel so that nobody sees it (Mt. 25:25). Ultimately, the yeast hidden within us at the time of sowing the seed, at the time the yeast is first inserted into the dough, will become public. In the wider context of this section, the Lord is explaining to the disciples the tragedy of how the seed or yeast first sown by John the Baptist has not achieved its intended result- because people were still hiding it, as Joseph and Nicodemus did (Jn. 19:38 s.w.- Joseph was a 'secret' or 'hidden' disciple). And we find the same word just two verses later in Mt. 13:35- the Lord was now speaking forth publicly things which had been 'hidden' (AV "kept secret") in the Old Testament period. The treasure was "hid" in the field of the world, but the Lord Jesus gave all that He had so that He could redeem / buy the world, the field, and bring the hidden treasure to light (Mt. 13:44). Perhaps we could say that the yeast was only hidden to those who did not have eyes to see; for that has been the context of the Lord's teaching here (see on 13:10).

In three measures of flour until it was all raised- Until the flour was completely influenced. The hint could be that when the Gospel, the yeast, has done its complete work and the flour is finally completely leavened into a loaf- then the Lord will come. His work then will be complete. The calendar date of the Lord's return is therefore 'open' to some extent, just as the harvest is reaped only when the fruit (of the Spirit) has been brought forth.

It's tempting to see some connection with Paul's warning that false teachers must be removed from the church, because a little yeast leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). It could be that he is simply using the figure of yeast in a different sense. But his frequent allusions to the Gospels make us wonder whether he is consciously alluding to the Lord's teaching here in Mt. 13:33. It could be that he is saying 'Get rid of the *old* yeast, the yeast of false teaching and associated unspirituality- and instead, be influenced by the *true* yeast, of Christ's teachings rather than the yeast of *false* teaching'.

13:34 *All these things spoke Jesus in parables to the crowds, and without a parable he said nothing to them*- See on 13:10. The idea surely is that *from now onwards* the Lord only spoke parables to them, which explains the shocked question of the disciples in :10 as to why there was this change of teaching method. Mark adds that the Lord Jesus spoke the word to men "as they were able to hear it", not as He was able to expound it (Mk. 4:33). He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed. The language of Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel is very different to that we encounter in the other Gospels. Indeed, the difference is so striking that some have claimed that John put the words into Jesus' mouth in his account. My suggestion is that the Lord did in fact say all the words attributed to Him in all the Gospel records. But He had two levels of talking with people- a Heavenly, spiritual kind of style (which John picked up on); and also a more earthly one, which Matthew, Mark and Luke tended to record. In our context, the simple point that emerges is that Jesus spoke in different ways to different people; He tailored His language in accordance with His audience. It's significant that there are no records of Jesus casting out demons in John's record; this occurs only in the more audience-friendly accounts of the Synoptics. There is a tendency, it seems to me, for brethren particularly to insist on flaunting their knowledge, to have to correct others who have inferior knowledge or less mature interpretations. The Lord taught men the word "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), not as He was able to expound it. If we ask where He obtained this humility and ability from, it is clearly an inheritance from His dear mother, who stored up things in her heart and didn't reveal them to others, just quietly meditating over the years. He spoke the word to men "as *they* were able to *hear* it"- He didn't always relay to men the maximum level of understanding which He Himself possessed . There is a tendency amongst some personality types to turn every disagreement over interpretation of Scripture into a right: wrong, truth: error scenario. Matters relating to basic doctrine are capable of being dealt with like this. But to turn the interpretation of every Bible verse into a conflict area is a recipe for ecclesial disaster. So often the debate becomes personal, with a brother sure that *he* is right and the other wrong, and the other must be shown to be wrong. This leads inevitably to pride, and there is the possibility that the other party is degraded and feels abused by the other. We simply have to accept that much of Scripture is open to various levels of interpretation, which if placed side by side would appear to be contradictory. Consider, for example, how many different applications the NT gives to Psalms 2 and 110.

13:35 *This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet*- Again we see the Lord consciously trying to make the word flesh.

I will open my mouth in parables- Asaph in Psalm 78 seems to be saying that he was going to recount the history of Israel in order to reveal to his audience the hidden message of Israel's history; and he was not going to "hide" that message from them, but rather to 'declare' it and 'make it known': "I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, declaring to the generation to come the praises of Yahweh, His strength, and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a teaching in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children" (Ps. 78:1-5). And yet the Lord has been saying that He will teach in parables in order to hide, not declare and not make known God's Truth to the majority of Israel. But Psalm 78 says that He *will* declare these things. The point surely is that these truths were being declared, made known etc. *to the disciples*, but the very process would continue to hide them from Israel as a whole. The context of Ps. 78 is likely Asaph seeking to declare to Judah under Babylonian domination the meaning of their history and how Israel's history was to come to a climax and a full declaration of its meaning in Messiah. It therefore has relevance to the true Israel under Roman domination. Note that Ps. 78:2 is quoted here as it is in Jn. 6:31; Ps. 78 is alluded to at least 10 times in the N.T. The strongly uneven nature of quotation from the OT shows that some OT chapters were as it were proof texts for the early church; Ps. 110 is the clearest example.

I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world- See on 13:33 *hid*. Many of the Lord's parables portray the [preaching of] the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a kind of secret force: treasure hidden in a field, the tiniest seed in the garden, wheat growing among weeds, a pinch of yeast worked into dough, salt on meat... these are all images of something which works from within, changing other people in an ongoing, regular manner.

13:36 *Then he left the crowds*- AV "Sent the multitude away*".* Here we sense the power of the Lord's personality, able somehow to send a crowd of eager people away.

And went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying: Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field- The disciples only got the interpretation of the parables because they made the effort to go into the house and ask Him. Previously in this chapter the Lord has spoken of how blessed they are because they understand the parables, and how the crowds don't. But clearly effort had to be made to reach that understanding, it was not automatically beamed into them. They clearly didn't automatically understand the parables because they asked the Lord

to “declare” or (Gk.) expound them to them. They do the same in Mt. 15:15.

13:37 *And he answered and said: He that sows the good seed is*- The present tense may suggest that the Lord was referring to the response to His preaching there and then.

The Son of Man- But it also refers to any preacher. If we are in Christ, then in our preaching, we are Him to this world.

13:38 *The field*- The emphasis is repeatedly on the fact that it is *His* field (:24,27,31). The Lord often speaks as if He has already overcome the world, even though the cross was still future for Him. So confident was He that the Father would bring Him through to inherit all things.

Is the world- In the first instance, the Jewish world.

And the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom- We would expect the good seed to represent God’s word, as it does in the earlier parable of the sower. And in a sense, it does; but the word becomes flesh in those who truly respond to it, and therefore the Lord interprets it as individual believers. Being ‘children of’ something suggests that we have that thing as our family of origin, our parent. And this is how we should feel towards the things of God’s Kingdom. “The Kingdom” is placed in contrast with “the wicked one”. The plants are the children or offspring of whoever sowed them. The weeds were sown by the wicked one, and the good seed were sown by the Lord Jesus; but He is styled “the Kingdom” in that as King of that Kingdom, this is a legitimate title for Him. He was and is the essence of the Kingdom.

It is our attitude to God's word which is the fundamental indicator of our spirituality. The sower parable teaches this by its equation of the seed / word and the types of ground. In the next (but related) parable of the tares, "the good seed are the children of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:38)- i.e. the seed / word is people. In the sower parable, we read of "He which received seed by the way side" (Mt. 13:19), connecting the believer with a type of ground which receives the seed, whilst Lk. 8:12,13 speak of the people as the seeds rather than the types of ground: "Those (seeds) by the way side are they... they on the rock are they...". Mt. 13:19 speaks of people receiving seed by the way side, but Mk. 4:15 likens their *heart* to the way side, where the seed was sown. In God's sight, a person *is* his heart or way of thinking (Prov. 23:7); and to God, a person's attitude to the word *is* his mind.
The RV translates the parable of the sower as if the seed sown is the

convert: “he that was sown…” (Mt. 13:19 RV). And later on in Mt. 13:38 we are told so again: “the good seed are the children of the Kingdom”. Yet the seed was a symbol of the word of God. The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (Is. 55:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Is this parable only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man’s rejection? Thus the word of God was ‘made void’ by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV- a conscious allusion to Is. 55:11?)…. This is perhaps one of the most defiantly unanswerable questions in our experience. As an aside, one possible explanation is that “the word” which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God’s intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the ‘prospering’ of the Servant in His work: Is. 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: “…until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished”. Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God’s word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 AVmg., where we read that “the man clothed with linen”- representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel- “returned the word, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me”. The word ‘returned’ in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren’t. We must believe, really and truly, that the word will not return void, but it will accomplish what it is intended to achieve. We are not scattering seed with the vague hope that something might sprout up; we are planting, fully expecting to see a harvest. “The word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24) surely means that the number of converts to the word multiplied- for the same word is repeatedly used in this sense (Acts 6:1,7; 5:14; 9:31; 19:20). Thus “the word of God” is put by metonymy for ‘the response to the word of God’, as if the word will inevitably bring forth response.

And the weeds are the sons of the evil one- I have demonstrated throughout the exposition of this chapter, beginning with the parable of the sower, that the adversary to the growth of the word of Jesus in the first century was initially the Jewish system. They are here personified as 'the wicked one'. And the noun is used elsewhere in this context by the Lord; He speaks of not resisting the evil one [s.w.] when the disciples were hit on the cheek, which was distinctly a synagogue punishment for uttering heresy (Mt. 5:39). Judaism understood 'the wicked one' as a personal Satan figure, but the Lord is redefining it- as they themselves. On a wider scale, the New Testament does this masterfully, redefining the common understanding of 'Satan', the adversary, the wicked one, as a personification of you yourself. The Lord specifically defines the Jewish religious leaders as 'the wicked one' in Mt. 7:11: "If you then, being evil

[Gk. 'the wicked one']...". Earlier that same day (Mt. 13:1) the Lord had three times called them "evil ones" and an "evil generation", using the same word *poneros* (Mt. 12:34,39,45; John's Gospel likewise records the Lord calling the Jewish world "evil" in Jn. 3:19; 7:7). They were the personification of 'the wicked one' because they had 'evil' [s.w.] in their hearts (Mt. 9:4 "why do you think evil in your hearts?"); for moral 'evil' comes from the heart (Mt. 15:19). Later in this chapter He uses the word to speak of how the 'wicked ones' will be separated from the righteous at the last day (Mt. 13:49). Clearly 'the wicked ones' are people- and not supernatural beings. Note how the very same word and grammatical construction is used to describe a church member as "the wicked one" (1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:2). The term does not of itself require any reference to a supernatural being.

We shouldn't seek to over-interpret every element of a parable- although such approaches often yield very fruitful lessons. Indeed, here is the difference between parables and allegories- an allegory requires every symbol to be interpreted, but parables aren't like this. It's a different genre. The focus is often on the end stress, not the details of the parable itself. And so I submit that rather do we need to seek to perceive the main issues which the Lord is seeking to get over to us, through these special features of His stories. Indeed, when the Lord *does* give interpretations of His parables, He doesn't give interpretations of every feature which formed the furniture of the parable. When He gives quite a detailed interpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares, He doesn't comment on the significance of the servants sleeping, the barn, the *bundling* of the weeds, etc.

13:39 *The enemy that sowed them is*- The Lord uses the same word in Lk. 19:27 to describe how the Jews who refused the Gospel were the Lord's "enemies". Paul likewise uses it to speak of how the unbelieving Jews are "enemies" (Rom. 11:28).

The Devil- see on :38.

The harvest- The Lord used the same metaphor in Mt. 9:37,38 in speaking of how during that earlier part of His ministry, the harvest was ongoing and He was sending out the disciples to reap the harvest; at that time, the Lord could say that "the fields are white already to harvest" (Jn. 4:35); the disciples were sent out to harvest it (Jn. 4:38 s.w., AV "to reap", literally 'to harvest'). But now He speaks of the harvest as being at a considerable distance in time from where they were now located- "the end of the age". This could be an example of the 'now but not yet' theme, whereby the language of the Lord's return and future Kingdom is used about our present experience. But in line with my observations about the

abrupt change in the Lord's attitude to Israel at the end of chapter 12 (see on 13:1,10), it seems to me that He now considered that the time of harvest had been delayed. The parable of the sower earlier in the chapter had taught that the crop would only be reaped "when the harvest is come" (Mk. 4:29). This likewise was an implicit statement that the time of harvest in Mt. 9:37,38 had now been delayed. And one of the factors was not simply that the fruit was not ready, but that there had been insufficient labourers to harvest it (Mt. 9:38). Likewise the parable of the weeds suggests that weakness amongst the Lord's servants had led to the problem being experienced- if they had not slept, then the enemy would not have sown the weeds (Mt. 13:25). This is perhaps why towards the end of His ministry, the Lord taught that *He personally* was going to do the harvesting, albeit assisted by the Angels (Mt. 25:26 "I harvest", s.w.; AV "reap"); see on :41.

Is the end of the world- The Greek *aion* means 'age', and so there is no suggestion here of the destruction of planet earth. The disciples impatiently asked when this would be, using the same term (Mt. 24:3). The phrase is only used outside Matthew in Heb. 9:26, where we read that the Lord's death on the cross was "the end of the age"- and this is part of an argument that the Mosaic age has ended and should not be, as it were, lived in any longer. Paul uses a related phrase in 1 Cor. 10:11 to describe how his generation lived at a time when the ends of the ages had *already come*. Paul was writing before AD70. In neither of these references is there any suggestion that 'the end of the age' was in AD70; rather the reference is to the Lord’s death on the cross, which ended the Mosaic age. The Lord defines "the end of the age" more specifically in Mt. 13:40 as "the end of *this* age"- the period in which He was then living, which was the Mosaic age. The significance of the events of AD70 appears to me to have been overstated and over interpreted by many expositors. I suggested that "the harvest" was possible in the first part of the Lord's ministry, but He delayed it because of Israel's lack of fruit and a lack of faithful harvesters. He delayed to 'the end of the age'- His death on the cross. But the harvest didn't happen then either. God's ultimate appeal, indeed the ultimate appeal of Jesus Himself, was in His death, in His body hanging upon the cross for all to see, and in His resurrection. But that appeal went unheeded by Israel. And so it seems to me that the time of harvest has again been delayed, to the final end of the age at His second coming. The great preaching commission includes the promise of the Lord's personal presence with and support to His preachers "until the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20); the implication could be that the new age which the Lord had in mind would be terminated by the Gospel being preached into all the world. This naturally connects with the Lord's teaching that the Gospel "shall be preached in all the world... and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14). He doesn't define "the end". The end of what? Surely "the end of the age" which He had taught about here in Mt. 13:39. But the "end" is therefore without a specific chronological terminus- because it

depends upon whether the preachers take the Gospel to all the world. Perhaps He didn't say specifically "the end of the age" in Mt. 24:14 because He realized that His death would be the end of one age, the Mosaic age, but the final end of the age would depend, to use His earlier metaphor, upon the ripening of the harvest and the zeal of the preachers to harvest it.

And the reapers are Angels- "The reapers" means literally 'the harvesters'. The same word has been used for how the disciples were sent to harvest in the earlier part of the Lord's ministry. The suggestion could be that this is all part of the Lord's changed program- now, it is no longer the disciples who would reap, but the Angels would. Note how the Lord's parable of labourers in the vine harvest suggests He had a chronic problem getting enough workers- the owner is desperate to get absolutely anybody to do a bit of work in that harvest, paying men a day's wage if they only worked one hour. And connect this with how the Lord prayed and asked others to pray that more labourers would be sent out to harvest (Mt. 9:38).

The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Mt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return" immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves.

13:40 *As therefore the weeds are gathered up and burned*- These are the same weeds of the sower parable, who choke the response of people to the message of Christ, initially in the form it was preached by John the Baptist. They refer to *people*; yet the similar parable of Mt. 25:41 speaks of how the devil and his angels, his followers, are to be burnt in fire. The devil and his angels therefore refer in the first context to the individuals and collective system behind them which have discouraged response to Christ. The 'angels' of Mt. 25:41 are the weed category of people defined here in chapter 13.

With fire, so shall it be at the end of the world- I suggested in the above commentary on :39 that the harvest began earlier in the Lord's ministry, but He recalculated His program and delayed it. Likewise the idea of a gathering of and destruction of the wicked in "fire" is clearly taken from the Lord's earlier teaching that the fruitless trees were even then being

cut down and were about to be thrown into the fire (Mt. 7:19- note the tenses), which was in turn repeating the words of John the Baptist, who predicted that in the ministry of the Jesus whom he was announcing, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor and he will gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:11,12). Note again the tenses- this was about to happen, the winnowing fan was already in the hand of the Lord Jesus. But now, the Lord reschedules that judgment and burning until "the end of the age", and urges the disciples to allow the weeds to grow in the field and just wait until Divine judgment comes. Again, it would be possible to understand all this as part of the nexus of 'now but not yet' language we find in the New Testament; in a sense, that fire was "already kindled" by human rejection of the message (Lk. 12:49), and we can even now drag men out of that fire (Jude 23). But the context of Matthew 13 is without doubt a change in program by the Lord, and I therefore prefer to see this change in timing as part of His rescheduling of His program. In the past, God Himself had clearly reinterpreted and rescheduled His prophetic intentions with Israel and various Gentile nations (e.g. Nineveh), and so this should not strike us as unusual. Indeed in these last days it could well be that there were various times in the 20th Century when prophetically, the stage was set for the Lord's return; but there was again a rescheduling, partly because of the poorness of the harvest, and partly because of the reluctance of His people to go out and gather it, preferring instead to squabble amongst themselves and chase their own tails over the finer points of Biblical interpretation.

13:41 *The son of man*- A term often associated with the Lord in His role as final judge, for due to having fully had human nature, He thereby has the right to judge men (Jn. 5:27).

Shall send forth His Angels- Practically and concretely, how will we be gathered to judgment? How? When? It seems that the Angels will suddenly appear to us in the course of our mundane lives, and invite us to go to meet Christ. "The reapers" of the harvest "are the angels"; it is they who will gather the believers, and then divide them into wheat and tares (Mt. 13:40-42). As men gather in a net and sort out the fish, so the angels will at judgment day (Mt. 13:47-50). "Men (angels) gather (the branches), and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). This same equation of men and angels is seen in Lk. 6:38, this time concerning how the angels will mete out rewards as well as punishment at the judgment.

The Greek *apostello* ("send forth") is earlier used of the Lord sending forth the apostles / disciples to gather the harvest (Mt. 10:5,16,40; 20:2;

Mk. 3:14). But now the Lord is rescheduling His program, perhaps due to the weakness of the disciples in doing the work (see on :39 *The harvest*); instead of them doing the work, He would do it, at the end of the age, through His Angels. The same word is used in the preceding sower parable, of how the sickle is 'sent forth' to gather the harvest when it is ripe (Mk. 4:29). Such rescheduling is common in God's working with men. Earlier, the Father had 'sent forth' prophets at the time of harvest- but they had not been given any fruit; and therefore He sent His Son (Mk. 12:2 s.w.). The same word is used about how at "supper time", when all things of the Kingdom were "ready", servants were "sent" to bring the guests (Israel) to the table (Lk. 14:17); but they refused.

It is not until the harvest that they are sent out to root out of the Kingdom all things that offend. There is a sense in which the Angels have limited knowledge about our spiritual capacities; "We are made a spectacle... to Angels" (1 Cor. 4:9) implies that the Angels look on at the sufferings God has brought on us through our guardian Angel, and intensely scrutinize how we are acting as if earnestly watching a theatre play (so the word "spectacle" implies). Thus they are anxiously looking for the outcome of their trials on us, not knowing the final result. The fact that only at the judgement will the names of the worthy be confessed to the Angels by Jesus (Rev. 3:5) makes it appear that the ultimate outcome of our probations is not known to our guardians, hence their eagerness in our lives to see how we react.

It seems that when Christ first comes, He sends *His* Angels to gather us (Mt. 13:41), and it is also His Angels which punish the wicked (Mt. 13:41); however it is God's Angels which reward the righteous (there seems a distinction between the Angels of God and of Christ). The Angels of Christ bring us to Him with their report on us, and He then makes the decision- those same Angels are told to arrange the destruction of their charge if unworthy, whilst the worthy are confessed to the Angels of God for glorification.

And they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling and them that do iniquity- Literally, 'All that offend'. The sentence continues: "And *them* which do iniquity". The reference is to *people*, those weeds who stopped others growing, in the terms of the parable of the sower. Causing stumbling to others is clearly a major sin in the Lord's eyes, and we need to give His perspective its full weight in assessing the likely impact of our dealings with others. To cause others to stumble, to offend them, leads to condemnation with a millstone around the neck; but we can do that *in this life*, be condemned for it, and yet whilst there is life- we can repent. For Peter was one such who potentially caused another (none less than the Lord) to stumble (Mt. 16:23). We note that it

is the Jewish world whom the Lord saw as full of offence / stumbling (Mt. 18:7). In our day it is those who cause division who cause others thereby to stumble (Rom. 16:17); for even the whiff of division is what is so spiritually carcinogenic to new converts and indeed to us all. Causing others to stumble from the path to the Kingdom is the leading characteristic of the condemned, according to the Lord's words in Mt. 13:41. Compare His words: "It is inevitable that offences come; but woe to that man by whom they come" with "The son of man goes as it is written of him; but woe to that man (Judas) by whom the son of man is betrayed!". The Lord sees those who cause offence as being as bad as Judas. It's serious. We are the body of Christ. It has been truly said that Jesus has no face, no hands, no legs on this earth apart from us. Positively, this means that we beseech men and women "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 2:10 RV).

The Kingdom is here described by the Lord as a time when all those in the ecclesia who cause others to stumble will have been thrown away into condemnation (Mt. 13:41). Yet in some things we all offend others (James 3:2). Our places in the Kingdom will therefore be by pure grace alone; but we must respond to this wonder by *trying* as earnestly as possible to only upbuild and not to stumble our brethren. A personally 'righteous' believer may well be excluded from the Kingdom for the effect he has had on others. Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having 'driven out' Israel from their land (Jer. 23:2,3,8); the pastors' sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken.

"Them that do iniquity" are not necessarily a separate category to 'all who offend'. To cause others to stumble is the essence of 'doing iniquity'. And we can make others stumble passively; for attitude and unspoken messages have huge effect upon others' spirituality. *Anomia*, "iniquity", is literally 'not-law'. Yet again the Lord is driving home the paradox- the legalistic, law-following Jews were in fact not keeping the Law. The Lord specifically states that the Pharisees are "full of iniquity" (Mt. 23:28 s.w.). And in Mt. 24:12 He again defines 'iniquity' as being damaging to others- the abounding of 'iniquity' causes "the love (*agape*) of many [to] become cold". And in our own times, this is clearly seen; legalistic attitudes cause that vital *agape* love to disappear from individuals and communities of believers.

13:42 *And shall cast them into the fiery furnace*- Defined in 13:50 as *the* furnace of fire. The reality and picture of final condemnation was so clearly in the Lord's mind so often. He saw clearly where disbelief in

Him and legalistic behaviour was going to ultimately lead. To Jewish minds, the idea of being cast into a fiery furnace on a King's orders obviously recalls Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being cast into such a furnace in Daniel 3. This incident was held up in militant Judaism of the time as the ultimate example for Israel in their struggle against the Gentile world. But, the Lord is saying, there will be no deliverance for you. *The* furnace begs for Biblical identification with Sodom and Egypt both being described as "the furnace" (Gen. 19:28; Dt. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4); and yet Jerusalem was to become "the furnace" when burnt by Babylon (Ez. 22:18,20,22). The punishment of the rejected will be to be treated as this world, "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sharing Babylon's judgment of having a millstone around her neck and being cast into the sea of the world. But Judaism's strongest theme was their much vaunted separation from the Gentile world. And yet they were to be judged as the very world they hated, because in essence their legalism brought them to the same moral position as that world, and even far worse.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth- A phrase so often used by the Lord (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). He evidently had the vision of the last day judgment before Him. Here, as so often, it serves well to consider in what tone of voice He spoke. His passion for the lost and urgent desire to save from condemnation lead us to wonder if He spoke these words almost in tears, knowing what was coming. The desolation of the rejected would be so deep because they would then realize the eternal future they could have had. When He spoke of blessedness for those who weep now (Lk. 6:21), the Lord surely meant 'those who weep for the wretchedness of their own spiritual failure, who recognize how worthy they are of condemnation and feel it as if it had happened'. In contrast, those who wish to appear so spiritually wonderful before men will "weep" in the last day- they will be condemned (Lk. 6:25 s.w.). Peter likewise wept in this life after denying the Lord, experiencing the condemnation of going out from the Lord into darkness with shame; but repented and will be saved.

13:43 *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*- The second coming of Christ as Malachi's "sun of righteousness" is a clear Bible theme. At the transfiguration, a clear vision of the Kingdom age, the Lord's face shone as the sun (Mt. 17:2); and it is He personally who shall shine forth to all at His second coming (Lk. 17:24). The Lord is saying that we will then be openly revealed as Him. But "shine forth" translates *ek-lampo*; and we are to be a visible *lampo* right now, shining in a way which cannot be hid from men (Mt. 5:15,16). Again and again, we find the Lord's later teaching so often rooted in the Sermon on the Mount. Our shining before men now is related to our shining eternally in the age to come. The other clear OT

allusion is to Dan. 12:3- those who turn many to righteousness shall shine eternally. The opposite to causing others to stumble (and being condemned for it) is to teach others righteousness (and be saved). We cannot therefore be somehow in a neutral position, doing nobody any evil and yet nobody much good either. We are either making them stumble or turning them to righteousness.

Contrary to how some wish to interpret things, the Lord did understand "the Kingdom" to have a future aspect; for He speaks of how "then... in the Kingdom" the righteous will shine as the sun. The shining of the sun was to give light on earth, and this basic reason for the sun is mentioned often in the Bible. In some way, we shall eternally give light to others; and this aspect of the Kingdom life must begin in us now. Even in the future Kingdom, the basis of our witness to the world will be that we are in Christ. Thus Micah's description of how "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass" (Mic. 5:7) is consciously alluding to the then-famous Messianic prophecy of Ps. 72:6: "*He* shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth". The blessings Messiah brings are to be articulated through the witness of those in Him. Those who have lived in Him will then shine as the brightness of the firmament (Dan. 12:3). But the description of the Lord's face shining as the sun draws on this; as if to say that our shining in the future Kingdom will be because we were and are in Him. We will shine forth then (Mt. 13:43), as the Sun of righteousness Himself.

He who has ears, let him hear- The Lord has earlier in this chapter told the disciples that His audiences generally did not have ears to hear; but the disciples do. This would therefore be an invitation to the disciples specifically to use the potential for understanding which they had. They were to continue shining; for the context of this whole long day's teaching (see on 13:1) was that they were weary in their witness because of opposition and lack of response.

13:44 *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field*- This mini parable, and the next one about the man seeking to buy pearls, presents things to us from the perspective of the Lord Jesus. He had just taught that "The field is the world" (:38). Who bought / redeemed the world? The Lord Jesus. It is "*His* field" (13:27,31). When did the Lord "buy" (this is the word usually translated "redeem") the world? In His death on the cross, which cost Him all that He had. We note that the parable puts the focus on the joy of the obtaining rather than all that was given up and lost. Surely Paul alludes here when he writes that we are "bought [s.w.] with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and should act and feel accordingly. Why did the Lord do this? Because within "the world" there

was "treasure"- us, those who are finally His special personal possession. Here we see neatly explained the difference between the Lord's redemption of the whole world, "all men", and yet personal salvation only being experienced by a few hidden within the world, His "treasure". Rev. 5:9 may have this in mind when speaking of how the saved were "redeemed [s.w. "bought"] by [Christ's] blood out of every tribe, language, people and nation". But to save *us* He had to redeem the world, purchase the field. Yet we are 'hidden' in the world; not that our faith is to be invisible, but insofar as we are a minority. This again was in the context of encouraging the disciples that the poor response to their message in the Jewish world was nothing to be unduly discouraged by. The world- and perhaps the Lord had in view the *Jewish* world for whom Christ primarily died (Gal. 4:4,5)- was to be bought by Christ in His death, but only a few would respond and be 'found' as His treasure. Again, we find "treasure" mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. The principle that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mt. 6:21) applied to the Lord- His heart is totally with us. And there is to be a mutuality between a man and his Lord; if we are our Lord's treasure, then we are not to lay up treasure on earth, but rather have Him as *our* treasure (Mt. 6:19,20) just as we are *His* treasure. Paul seems to play around with this idea of 'hid treasure', for he uses the same Greek words twice. But each time, slightly differently. He speaks of how we the light of God's glory has *shone* in our hearts, using the very same word as in Mt. 13:43 about the righteous shining as the sun in the Kingdom; but he then says that this "treasure" is hidden in the "earthen vessels" of our own bodies (2 Cor. 4:6,7). Just as we as a community are 'hidden' in the soil of the field / the world, so actually the real essence of our relationship with Christ is likewise hidden within all the dust of our own personal humanity. This is not to say that we can relax and justify worldly living as being merely 'the flesh'. But it is a comfort that the Bible teaching here recognizes that our real spiritual essence is indeed 'hidden' in the dust and ashes of all we have to do as we go about life in the flesh in this present world. Again, as it were playing with the ideas, Paul speaks of how "In Christ are *hid* all the *treasures* of wisdom" (Col. 2:3). There is no very obvious semantic connection with the Lord's teaching about us being His treasure hid in this world. So perhaps this is one of Paul's many unconscious allusions to the Gospels, whereby he had the words so deeply in his consciousness that they influenced his thinking and writing both consciously and unconsciously. For more examples of this, see my discussion of the issue in *Bible Lives*.

Which a man found- In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord had put the emphasis upon *us* seeking and finding the way to life (Mt. 7:7,8,14; 16:25). Yet He is also searching for us; He speaks of how He 'found' faith in a Gentile man, and had been seeking to find such faith in Israel (Mt. 8:10 s.w.). The Lord told parables of Himself as the good shepherd seeking and *finding* the lost (Lk. 15; Mt. 18:13 s.w.), of Him seeking and

finding workers for His work (Mt 20:6), wanting to *find* fruit on the fig tree (Mt. 21:19; Lk. 13:7), *finding* people to come to the marriage supper (Mt. 22:9,10). This is why when the searching Lord finds the man searching for Him, there is a spark of mutuality which makes all the Angels of the cosmos rejoice. Thus the same words are used about the early disciples 'finding' Christ, and Him 'finding' them (Jn. 1:41,43). We may justifiably speak of our search for God, for Jesus, for "the truth", but the reality is that the Father and Son were in search of *us.* The Hebrew prophets likewise present God as in search of man, and not simply awaiting our approach to Him if we wish to make it, with passive emotionless indifference. The Lord is saying that His death on the cross would not be simply to die for the world; it was because He had 'found' the treasure of believers. But who did He find? A small group of mixed young men, one time prostitutes and a few Gentiles. That was enough. His finding of *them* motivated Him to die for the world that He might save *them*. In this we have a window onto the apparent 'wastage' of God; that the whole world was redeemed just for the sake of a few. Some argue for universal salvation on this basis- that why should Christ have died to save just a few. But the parable is clear- it was for joy at having found the minority, which were to Him a priceless treasure, He bought the entire field- just to get them. This is the waste and abandon that comes with love, and only a utilitarian, pragmatic, loveless legalist would question its authenticity, credibility or necessity. So the Lord is encouraging His dispirited disciples that He has found them, and He rejoices over them with love and devotion; and they have found Him. That the rest of the world haven't responded cannot take anything away from this experience.

And hid- It seems that He hides the treasure, although it could mean that He hides Himself. Hiding the treasure gives the impression of an intensely personal relationship between Him and the treasure which He can't share with others. Or if He hides Himself for a period before going to buy the field, we likewise get the impression of a man overcome with an intense sense of in-loveness which only He can understand. This is how He felt about the disciples. It could be in the context of 13:10-15 (see notes there) that He means that He is hiding Himself from the world by telling them parables from now on; and instead will focus on giving His all to get the disciples and the few with "ears to hear" as His special treasure. He is thus putting a far more positive slant on His realization of how Israel generally have rejected Him, only a minority have accepted Him, and Israel had not accepted her king, nor John’s ministry, and so Yahweh’s glory was not going to come to Zion as envisaged. The Lord is saying that He has so fallen in love with the remnant who *had* responded, that He felt a joy so great that He would give all He had to redeem the whole world in order to save them. And this is in keeping with His teaching in the previous parables- that the wonder of the few good seeds who respond

amazingly, of the wheat that grows so well despite the weeds, is such that all the loss, rejection and casualty is worth it.

If we really want to make encounters and conversations work, we need to consider who we're talking with. The Lord's parables of Mt. 13:44-49 make it clear that people have different motivations when they first encounter our preaching. Some are merely fish caught in the Gospel net and compelled to come in; others are as the merchant man who is searching for good pearls, who sells all he has to get that pearl and just have it, gazing at it with admiration and appreciation each day; others are as the man who finds something of value in a field, maybe he sees there's some precious raw material he can exploit there, and so he buys the field in order to get some benefit for himself. The strange (to my ears) comment in Mt. 13:44 that the man 'hides' his discovery appears to contradict the reality that we should joyfully share our discovery of Christ with others. Perhaps the picture is being painted of a man with all the wrong motivations, who comes to the treasure from the viewpoint of 'What can I selfishly get out of this' (it may be in our age... a desire for welfare support, a partner, a social club...). And yet all the same he has come to the treasure, been called to it, allowed to find it... that is perhaps the point. All these types of people have differing motivations, and need to be treated differently by us.
The man who finds treasure [or, perhaps, a deposit of precious metal in a field which could be mined] *hides the fact* (Mt. 13:44), and sells all he has to buy that field. The hiding of the discovery speaks to me of the utterly personal knowledge between a man and his Lord which we enter into when we 'find' the treasure of the Kingdom, the pearl of great price. For any man or woman who hears the Lord's words, He and His Father will enter in and make their abode with them (Jn. 14:23). Although we are a great multitude of redeemed, yet the communication of the Father and Son to us are still amazingly unique, even though we all hear and read the same actual words, and reflect upon the same facts. Right back at the beginning of God's relationship with Israel He had made the point that "I will meet you [plural] to speak there unto thee [you singular]" (Ex. 29:42).

And in his joy- This is the joy of the in-love Jesus, so excited at having found the remnant, the treasure in the field of the unbelieving world, so excited He hides Himself for a while, or hides the treasure from others' view. One of the motives behind His endurance of the cross (which was how the field of the world was bought / redeemed) was "joy". Not joy in the sense of giggling and happy-clappy; but "joy" in the sense that He could speak of "My joy" just hours before beginning the ordeal (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). The parables of Luke 15 describe the Lord's joy as being in

relation to finding the lost, and this was what had happened in the Lord's 'finding' of the disciples and responsive remnant.

He went and sold all that he had and bought that field- These very words are used by the Lord in teaching that the rich ruler should sell all that he has- and give to the poor (Lk. 18:22). The Lord wasn't asking the man to do anything that He Himself was not doing. His giving to the poor was in giving redemption to *us*. And the Lord was a "cheerful giver"; He gave up all "with joy" for us; and in the first instance, to die for that small group of mixed up men and women who tagged around with Him. "Sells *all*" might suggest He was wealthy; seeing that the Lord was not a wealthy man, we wonder what this 'wealth' was which He gave up, recalling Paul's comment that He who was rich became poor for our sakes on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). What did He 'give up' or 'sell'? What was His real loss? Perhaps it was that as God's Son He could personally have been saved without the cross, but He did all He did in order to save us- and thus set the ultimate example of overcoming selfishness.

The man who sells all to buy the field containing the treasure (Mt. 13:44)- what does he *do* with his newly found wealth? The question, of course, bids us reflect what we have done with the wealth of the Gospel which we have found. These open-ended parables with unanswered questions are left hanging because the point is, it all depends upon our response as to how they end in our cases! The parables are thus not just cosy stories. They challenge our response. Our tidy images of reality are shattered by the open endings and elements of unreality in the parables. Our minds are arrested and teased by them, as they lead us to self-realization, self-knowledge, at times even healthy self-condemnation. The parables, especially those which Luke records, appear to end leaving us with unanswered questions. Does the wounded traveller survive and get better? When does the Samaritan return? How much does it cost him? Was the beaten man happy to see the Samaritan when he returned? Who inherits the property of the rich fool? Does the barren fig tree produce a crop in the end? Does the elder brother finally join in the party? Does the unjust steward succeed in getting himself out of his problems after his dismissal? What happens to the rich man's five brothers, seeing Lazarus isn't allowed to go and warn them? Do they hear Moses and the prophets? Do the riff raff come in from the lanes to the Great Supper? Does the unjust judge actually resolve the widow's complaints? How does the rich merchant survive, after having sold all he has for the one pearl, thus discarding his entire past, his life's work…? And what does he do with the pearl? He, presumably, sits and treasures it, but can do nothing with it in order to prosper materially… And yet we are left to reflect upon this.

13:45 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a man that is a merchant*- A traveller, for that is the essence of the Greek word translated "merchant". He was going around seeking- just as Jesus was in search of believing hearts. Paul saw himself as the man who gives all to buy the pearl (Mt. 13:45,46 = Phil. 3:7,8; although this passage also alludes to Moses; as if he took inspiration from Moses to be like the man in the parable). He saw the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as the pearl whose beauty inspired even a rich man to give up all that he had. Paul took comfort, real comfort, from the way he found himself in situations similar to those of his Lord.

Seeking- Elsewhere the Lord speaks of Himself as *seeking* (s.w.) the lost- the lost coin, sheep and son (Lk. 15; 19:10 s.w.). Those rather unfortunate people were beautiful pearls to the Lord, and that is how He sees the irritating self-righteous ones, the alcoholics, the druggies, the lazy, the socially awkward… whom He so seeks as His precious treasure. We are to seek Him and His Kingdom and His Father (Mt. 6:33; 7:7,8). And yet He seeks us. Hence there is some kind of 'flash' when we meet, a flash which is felt throughout the cosmos, in which *all* the Angels of Heaven rejoice. The Lord was seeking fruit on the Jewish fig tree (Lk. 13:6 s.w.) and found none; but just one response was as it were a "pearl" for the Lord. Thus the Lord is presented as 'seeking' individuals who respond, often from very bad life situations. John puts this in more spiritual terms in recording how the Lord 'seeks' God's glory (Jn. 7:18), alluding to how Moses sought the same glory in more visible terms. The repentance of that unlikely minority is the very essence of Yahweh's glory.

Fine pearls- Perhaps the tension is between His seeking for pearls in the plural, but being so thrilled to find just one (:46), for which he was prepared to give all. This would be in the spirit of the preceding parables; that the beauty of the response of a minority is such that it makes the failure to redeem the others seem less hard. This merchant didn't find the many pearls he had intended to find; but he was so thrilled to find just one beautiful one that he would give all he had just to get it, and presumably, to end his business life and just sit and admire the pearl. For the question 'And what did he do next?' seems to require that kind of answer. For what he did wasn't the wise thing to do in business terms. It is the element of unreality in the little story. Note the use of pearls as representative of believers in Rev. 21:21; and see the note on "pearls" under Mt. 7:6.

13:46 *And having found one*- He was thrilled with just one, even though

He began seeking pearls in the plural (:45). The combination of 'seeking' and 'finding' beyond question is to be connected with the Lord's teaching about His seeking and finding of wayward individuals (Lk. 15 and see on :45; the same Greek word for "find" is used a significant seven times in the parables of Lk. 15). This strange little story could be making the simple point that if the Lord saved only one person, He would be thrilled by that. This is all directly in the context of this chapter, in which the Lord is discussing the general lack of response to Him, and comforting His flagging preachers in the disillusion which arises from little response to the Gospel. The Lord had taught that we should seek and be assured that we will find, in spiritual terms. All of His teaching He spoke to Himself, and He was the word of His own teaching made flesh. *His* understanding of seeking with the assurance of finding was that if we seek for persons to respond, we will find. Even if only one person. This surely should be our daily prayer- that we will be lead to meet the right people, that our seeking for others will result in at least one being found.

Of great price- As the King of the Kingdom, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" can in some ways be applied to the Lord personally. Having spoken of how "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38), the Lord goes straight on to speak of how "the Kingdom of Heaven" is like a man who gives all that he has so that he can buy or redeem a field in which He perceives treasure. The same man is also likened to a merchant who sells all that he has in order to buy a pearl of great price. In the utter bankruptcy, the selling all to obtain or redeem one thing, we surely see a parable of the cross, through which death the Lord Jesus redeemed the field of the world, and the pearl of great price [to Him]. Perhaps Paul had his eye on these parables when he spoke of how in the cross, the Lord Jesus who had been rich became poor for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9). That pearl, that treasure hidden within the field of the world, then becomes symbolic of us. It was of "great price" (Mt. 13:46)- and Paul again may have this in mind when he warns that we "are bought with a price" (using a related Greek word) and should therefore serve the Lord who bought us and not anyone else (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). Thus we see not only the cost of our redemption, the utter self-emptying of the Lord in His time of dying; but also a picture of how valuable we are to Him. We also see some outline explanation of the way in which the Lord's death redeemed "the world", and yet we are His special treasure hidden within it. In one sense we as His treasure is still hidden within this world; in another sense of course we are to be as a city set upon a hill which cannot be hid. We should be concerned at the danger of hiding our light under a bucket; but in another sense, our relationship to the Lord is such that it is by its wonderful nature 'hidden' from the world in which we currently lie. The strange feature of Mt. 13:44- that the man (in this interpretation, the Lord Jesus) 'hides' the treasure- perhaps becomes understandable in terms of Col. 2:3, which speaks of the Lord Jesus as having all God's treasures 'hidden'

in Himself. The 'man' bought the field "for joy thereof" (Mt. 13:44); and despite all the pressure of the crucifixion process, the Lord Jesus could still speak at that time of "my joy" in our redemption (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). Just as the merchant man was "seeking" pearls and 'found' one of great price, so the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus, 'seeks' [same Greek word] fruit on the fig tree (Lk. 13:6), 'seeks' the lost coin until it is found (Lk. 15:8), 'seeks' and saves that which was lost (Lk. 19:10) and 'seeks' His sheep until He finds them (Mt. 18:12). The 'finding' of the lost sheep, the pearl of great price, in some sense happened in the Lord's death. Hence He pictures Himself as the shepherd carrying the redeemed sheep on His shoulders with head bowed forward- exactly the posture of a man carrying a crossbar on his shoulders.

He went and sold all that he had- The very same phrase is used by the Lord in speaking of how the hopelessly indebted man was sold "and all that he had" (Mt. 18:26). The picture is of absolute and total destitution from selling every imaginable possession. This story does indeed have a strange twist to it. A rich man so loved a pearl which he saw that he became a pauper by selling absolutely *all* he had- his business, his transport, his expensive clothes- in order to buy a pearl. And, finishing off the story, we are to surely imagine him living the rest of his life in some humble dwelling amongst the poor of this world, daily admiring the beauty of his pearl, totally unrealized by the world around him, caring for it as the most important thing in his whole existence, realizing that in it was the epitome of absolutely all his being: his love, his wealth, his future, his joy of life day by day. And this is what the Lord did from His deep in-loveness with persons who only had potential to become pearls. He was and is in love with the idea of who we may become.

And bought it- The Greek is elsewhere translated "redeem". This speaks of our redemption by the love and self-sacrifice of the Lord on the cross. The emphasis is perhaps on *autos*, "it". He had searched for many pearls, but was thrilled with giving His all for just one single one.

13:47 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net*- It's so easy to have a negative spirit. Are people sincere? Do they just get baptized in the hope of material help? Can we cope with so many converts? Won't many of them leave? What does this person really believe about doctrine? Can you believe them? Isn't this or that the thin end of the wedge? This isn't the spirit of the Lord's parable about the drag net fishermen (note, not fishing with a line for a special, prize catch- but concentrating on saving as many as possible, of whatever quality, Mt. 13:47). In drag net fishing, one big fishing boat drags a net which is tied to a small dinghy. God's fishing is thus dependent on us, the smaller boat, working with Him. Thus the

harvest was plenteous during the Lord's ministry, but relatively few were converted due to the dearth of labourers (Mt. 9:37 implies). 1 Cor. 12:21 gives something more than a random example: the head (the Lord Jesus) cannot do without the feet (a symbol of the preacher in Rom. 10:15). In the work of witness especially, the Head is reliant on the preacher for the work He wills to be done.

That was cast into the sea and gathered fish of every kind- We are being gathered to judgment *now* (Mt. 13:47; 22:10; Jn. 11:52) although we will be gathered then to meet the Lord (s.w. Mt. 3:12; 13:30). We are as fish *gathered* into the net, and yet also *gathered* into vessels at the judgment (Mt. 13:47,48). The gathering is both then and now; our gathering into the net, our first response to the Gospel, is a gathering unto judgment. The Hebrew idea of 'calling' very often implies a calling to give account- e.g. God calling Adam to account (Gen. 3:9), Pharaoh calling Abram to account (Gen. 12:18), and Abimelech likewise (Gen. 20:9- other examples in Gen. 26:9,10; Dt. 25:8). Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively also a calling to give account. The point is, we must act now as men and women will do so on their way to judgment and the meeting with their ultimate destiny. Then we will not be bickering amongst ourselves or worrying about our worldly advantage; then, only one thing will matter. And so now, only one thing matters. When we go to judgment, we are not to look back as did Lot's wife; and yet we are not to look back having put our hand to the plough in this life. By starting on the way of Christ, we are starting on our way to judgment. See on 13:48.

"Of every kind" here is *genos*. Does *genos* here suggest that every genetic type of human being will have been called to the Gospel by the time the fishing is done? The word can of course refer to a nation or kindred. The suggestion is perhaps that once persons of every nation / kindred have been gathered into the net, then the night of fishing is over and the judgment (and therefore the Lord's return) can happen. Hence our extension of the Gospel net to every *genos* will affect the coming of the Lord. Mt. 24:14 is actually explicit about this; indeed, it is a repeated teaching of the Lord (although only implicit at times) that He will come only once we have extended the net of the Gospel to every nation.

13:48 *When it was full*- Again we see the teaching that the drawing of the net to shore, the beginning of judgment, the return of Christ- is only once we have achieved certain objectives in preaching. Every *genos*, every nation or kindred, must have its representatives in the net. It must be "full" in the sense that there is a specific number of persons who must be saved. Paul specifically states this and uses the same word translated "full" in Rom. 11:25: "Until the fullness [full number] of the Gentiles be

come in". "Until the times {s.w. "opportunity"] of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24) probably has the same reference- for the same word is used for "fulfilled" as for "full". The opportunity of the Gentiles to be saved will come to fullness. And then shall the end come.

Men drew it to shore- It cannot be incident that the only other usage of the word for "shore" in the synoptics is earlier in this chapter, in 13:1. The crowds stood on the shore, whilst the Lord taught them. In one sense, judgment is yet to come; in another, as we hear His word, we are judged. They on the shore were as it were at judgment day. See on :47 *gathered*.
Sat down- Perhaps alluding to how a judgment session 'sits'. But it cannot be accidental that the same word is used of how the Lord was "sitting" as He taught the people (the word is used twice- Mt. 13:1,2). As the people were on the shore, it was as if they were before Him in judgment; He sat there as if He were sitting in judgment before them. See on :47 *gathered*.

And sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad- An allusion to Jewish ideas that the Gentiles were those 'cast away' and that they were the 'good ones'. But the whole idea of the faithful coming out of the sea, with all its associations with the Gentile world, suggests that the Lord foresaw how many of the good fish would in fact be Gentiles and not Jews. The image of 'casting away' surely shows the Lord's attitude to the rejected. There is no pleasure in their destruction, but rather simply getting rid of them and focusing upon the "good" category. In a Jewish context, hearers would assume that the fish who were cast away were the ritually unclean fish of Lev. 11:10-12 which could not be eaten. The Jewish leaders who made others stumble are thus declared unclean, and fit only to at best be cast back into the sea, the Gentile world.

13:49 *So shall it be in the end of the world. The angels shall come forth and separate the wicked from among the righteous*- This work is actually done by the Angels, but the Lord uses the same word for "sever" in Mt. 25:32 for how He personally will separate the sheep from the goats. We can fairly assume that His personal judgment of us will to some extent be delegated to the Angels. If indeed we each have guardian Angels in this life, then their involvement in our judgment would be appropriate. The word is only elsewhere used in the Gospels for how the orthodox Jews would sever the true Christians from their fellowship (Lk. 6:22), and the word is likewise used in the sense of religious fellowship in Gal. 2:12, where Peter "separated himself" from table fellowship with Gentile Christians when the Jewish brethren were present. And this was how the word was used within the Judaism of the time- what we might call 'to disfellowship' in a religious sense. The sum picture of these usages is

surely that we are *not* to operate any fellowship policy which pretends to sever the clean from the unclean- because this is not for us to do, and whenever it was practiced (by the Jews and by Peter)- they got it wrong. The faithful were the ones wrongly separated from.

13:50 *And shall cast them into the fiery furnace. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*- See on 13:42.

13:51 *Have you understood all these things?-* The word is used repeatedly in the context concerning how the Jewish world do not understand, because they do not want to understand, whilst the Lord considers that the disciples have ears to hear and have indeed understood (Mt. 13:13,14,15,19,23). But the Lord wanted to be sure; He wanted to get the disciples to consider the question. *He* thought they understood, but He wanted *them* to know that they understand; He wanted them to share His view of them. Just as in Romans 6, Paul wants his readers to "consider" themselves as "in Christ" just as God sees them.

They said to him: Yes- AV "Yes, Lord*".* A little phrase we find a significant seven times on the lips of those who encountered Jesus and to whom He asked questions regarding their belief in and commitment to Him (Mt. 9:28; 15:27 Gk.; Mk. 7:28; Jn. 11:27; 21:15,16). I wonder whether it was the early equivalent of the later questioning of a baptismal candidate as to whether they believe, to which they effectively answer "Yes, Lord". In this case, the question to the candidate is ultimately asked by the Lord Himself, albeit through the medium of the baptizer: 'Do you understand and believe in Me?'.

13:52- see on 9:9.
And he said to them: Therefore every scribe- All of the other occurrences of the word in the Gospels refer to the Jewish scribes who spiritually lorded it over the masses of secular Jewish people. The Lord is inviting the disciples, who were largely secular men and women, to believe that if they did indeed 'understand' the things which the scribes did not- then *they* were the new scribes, the new religious leaders and interpreters of the Law, in the new Israel which the Lord was creating based around Him rather than Moses. The force of "*every* scribe" would be to assure the disciples that every single one of them was included in this new vision of leadership.

Who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven- The Greek *matheteuo* specifically means 'to disciple', and thereby the Lord is making clear the connection He sees between being a scribe (a teacher) and being a disciple (learner). Perhaps 'Matthew' saw the play on his own name. We cannot simply learn of Him; the nature of the understanding we receive is such that we must share it with others by teaching. The

Lord uses the same word in telling the disciples to go out and make disciples (Mt. 28:19). We are to seek to make men learners, not give them a set of theological truth which they are to grip on to in an unthinking manner. We are to lead them to the feet of Jesus and to a position wherein they accept *Him* as their teacher. Distributing New Testaments and persuading people to accept the message seems to me a classic way in which we can do this in our generation. And we wonder whether Matthew, *Matthaios*, specifically records this saying of the Lord which none of the other Gospel writers do exactly because he perceived the connection between his own name and the concept of discipleship. For the words are related. Remember that his Jewish name was Levi (Mk. 2:14), but Matthew seems to call himself 'Matthew', as if after his conversion, his very name and public image before men was now to be that of 'disciple'. Discipleship was a major concept for him.

Instruction in the things of the Kingdom in the context of Matthew 13 surely means to be instructed through correctly understanding the parables of the Kingdom which the chapter is full of. Because the disciples understood them, they were thereby instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We note that the things of the Kingdom which were explained by the parables were not simply details of the future Kingdom of God to be established on earth. They taught about the Lord Jesus and His ways amongst men- right now. It's quite possible that "the things of the Kingdom" and "the [things of the] name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12) are not two separate groups of theological teachings but rather are the two phrases put in parallel as referring to the same things. For the Lord Jesus was and is the essence of His Kingdom and the living exemplification of God's dominion / king-dom over men.

Is like a man who is a householder- The "householder", the head of the household, is a term used repeatedly by the Lord with reference to Himself personally; He considered the disciples to be the members of the new household over which He was head. Only a few verses earlier He has likened Himself to such a "householder", using the same word (Mt. 13:27; also in Mt. 10:25; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25; 14:21). Without any doubt, the Lord used this term about Himself. So He is saying that if they understood the essence of the parables of the Kingdom, they were not only as scribes, teachers, but like unto the head of the house Himself- the Lord Jesus personally. This is the specific teaching of Mt. 10:25: "It is enough for the disciple that he be[come] as his master". The Lord's teaching of others was not an end in itself; to know the mind of Christ and thus become as the teacher is a real possibility. The height of the calling and possibility is breath-taking. Correct 'understanding' of the Lord's teaching could not be given a higher importance and end result; although as I have tried to explain, 'understanding' is not the same as grasping academic theory. By its nature, it involves action. "A man, a householder" perhaps emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus in order

to demonstrate that rising up to His status is not at all out of the question for us who are human.

Who brings out- This was what the Lord was doing there and then in His teaching, bringing forth things of the new covenant and the old. And He is saying that if they are instructed in the things of the Kingdom, then they can do the same. The idea of bringing forth things out of a treasure must surely be connected with the Lord's usage of the very same words earlier that same day (13:1) in His teaching that "a good man out of the good *treasure* of his heart *brings forth* good things" (Mt. 12:35). The heart is also called the "treasure" in Mt. 6:21. In the context of 12:35, the Lord is referring to Himself as the "good man", who was doing good things- despite being accused of doing 'evil things' by the Jewish leaders. The ultimate 'treasure' of the Lord at this time was His heart, His mind. And thus the invitation to be "like" the Lord becomes even more intimate and meaningful. We are being invited here to have the mind of Christ. He has already explained that the learner [disciple] is to be the scribe [the teacher]. If we have the mind of Christ, then just as He brought forth things new and old from the treasure of that mind / heart, then we shall do likewise. Yet we note that the householder, the Lord Jesus, brings forth these things out of *His* treasure. And He has just spoken of how He finds His treasure- us- in the field of the world (Mt. 13:44 s.w.). The idea is that if the disciples understood, then He would bring forth out of *them* "things new and old" with which to impress the watching world. Again- the learners [disciples] were to be used by Him as scribes [teachers]. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3 s.w.), but He reveals these things to the world through His followers.

From his treasure- Every one who is taught the Gospel will naturally *bring forth out of his treasure* (his innermost heart- Lk. 6:45) things new and old- his new knowledge, plus his old things of the old covenant (Mt. 13:52 cp. Song 7:13). The Lord said that a scribe (one who knows well the Old Testament scriptures) who also knows the Gospel of the Kingdom is like a man who brings out of "his treasure" things new and old (Mt. 13:52). But Jesus had just defined the "treasure" as the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44). If we make that 'treasure' *our* personal treasure, the most valuable thing in our whole being, then out of the basic Gospel that is in our hearts we will bring forth things "new and old". Our treasure is where our heart is (Mt. 6:21). Yet the treasure is the basic Gospel, i.e., that Gospel lodged in our deepest hearts. The old things of basic certainties; and the new things relating to our increasing appreciation of what they really mean, these will come out of us in our lives and feeling and being.

Things new and old- The Lord's previous use of these terms in Mt. 9:17 was in the context of the things of the old and new covenants. Matthew's Gospel was clearly aimed at Jews, and his point in recording this was

surely to assure them that not everything from the "old" way had been rejected.

13:53 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed from there*- This seems to serve as the end point of the longest day recorded in the Lord's ministry apart from the crucifixion (see on 13:1). The idea is that when He had finished the teaching, He departed. We meet the same idea and Greek word for "finished" in Mt. 11:1 (also Mt. 19:1; 26:1- "When He had finished [s.w.] commanding His twelve disciples, He departed". We get the impression that He was teaching according to a program; when He had finished delivering what He intended, it was time to go. And He went. This impression is given several times in His ministry. The question is whether God directly revealed this to Him, or whether He Himself on His initiative designed a program of teaching and ensured that He kept to it. My sense is the latter, which explains the way that earlier in this chapter He appears to take the decision to change from one teaching program to another.

13:54 *And coming into his hometown he taught them in*- The fact Jesus had a *patria* is an eloquent essay in His humanity. His physical origins were earthly; He didn't literally come down from Heaven, having been a pre-existent being there.

Their synagogue- The Mosaic feasts are described in the OT as "feasts of the Lord", but in John as "the feast of the Jews". We have the same idea here in the reference to the synagogues as *theirs*. The Jews had hijacked *God's* religion and turned it into their own, just as "the table *of the Lord*" has been turned effectively into 'our table' by so many who profess to be mere guests at that table. Matthew repeatedly speaks of *their* synagogue (Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:17; 12:9), and also of the 'synagogues of the hypocrites' (Mt. 6:2,5; 23:6,34)- not the synagogues of God.

So much so that they were astonished- The Gospels emphasize how people were astonished at the Lord's *doctrine / teaching* (the same word is used in Mt. 7:28; 19:25; 22:33; Lk. 2:48; 4:32). There was something arrestingly different in the Lord's message, quite apart from the astonishing miracles He performed. We note how on hearing Paul's teaching, men were "astonished [s.w.] at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). Our preaching and teaching is the Lord Jesus as it were personally teaching others; for we are Him to this world. And the response to our teaching is therefore comparable to the response made to the Lord's. The phrase "wisdom and mighty works" in Greek seems to directly connect the wisdom [the teaching] and the miracles [the works].

Mk. 6:2 is more explicit in the connection: "What wisdom is this... that such might works are worked?". The miracles were therefore directly connected to His teaching. Any 'doing good' we may do in society is to be likewise underpinned by our teaching of the Gospel, and is to be a consciously connected exemplification of it. As in the Lord's ministry, there is to be a clearly visible connection between the teaching of the Gospel, and the good works.

And said: From where has this man received this wisdom and these mighty works?- The idea may have been: 'From God, or from Satan?'. But see on :56 *whence*. They couldn't 'get it' that a man could come to such things through private study of God's word and personal relationship with God.

One of the most surpassing wonders of the Lord's character was that He could live for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, never ever committing sin, and never ever omitting an act of righteousness... and yet when He stood up and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah, the people were scandalized. They were shocked that this carpenter's son should think He was anything much more than them. Yet whenever we try to be a bit more righteous than our fellows, it's always noticed and held against us. Yet the Lord Jesus was both perfect, and also in favour with men. He came over as the ordinary guy, and yet He was perfect, and the light of this world. In this there is a matchless example for us. This wondrous feature of the Lord's achievement in His own character is reflected by the way His own brothers, who knew Him better than any, perceived Him to be just an ordinary person. When He started implying that He was the Son of God, they thought He'd gone crazy. I wish to labour the point- that to my mind, one of the most artless and surpassing things about the Lord was that He lived a sinless life for 30 years, and yet when He began His ministry those He lived with were shocked that He could ever be the Messiah. He was "in favour" with men (Lk. 2:52), not despised and resented as many righteous men have been. He was the carpenter, a good guy- but not Son of God. Somehow He showed utter perfection in a manner which didn't distance ordinary people from Him. There was no 'other-worldliness' to Him which we so often project to those we live with. We seem to find it hard to live a good life without appearing somehow distasteful to those around us. In fact the villagers were scandalized [*skandalizein*] that Jesus should even be a religious figure; they had never noticed His wisdom, and wondered where He had suddenly gotten it from (Mk. 6:2,3). This suppression of His specialness, His uniqueness, must have been most disarming and confusing to Mary. Her son appeared as an ordinary man; there was no halo around His head, no special signs. Just an ordinary guy. And this may well have eroded her earlier clear understanding that here in her arms was the Son of God. Until age 30,

the Lord was “hidden” as an arrow in a quiver (Is. 49:2). So profound was this that Mary may have come to doubt whether after all He was really as special as she had thought, 30 years ago. 30 years is a long time. We also need to bear in mind that opposition to Jesus both from the other siblings and from His home town was significant. A fair case can be made that He actually moved away to Capernaum, perhaps before the start of His ministry. Mk. 2:1 RVmg. describes Him as being “at home” there; Mt. 4:13 NIV says He lived there; Mt. 9:1 calls it his “own city” (cp. Mk. 2:1). Don’t forget that the Nazareth people tried to kill Jesus early on in His ministry- this was how strong the opposition was. And Mary had to show herself for or against... and it seems she at least on the surface didn’t exactly show herself for Him.

13:55 *Is this not the carpenter’s son*- “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James? And they were offended at him" (Mk. 6:3). Mark records that they said “the carpenter” (Mk. 6:3). In full, therefore, they likely said that Jesus was “carpenter, son of a carpenter”. Such was His humanity that He appeared to have just followed the profession of His supposed ‘father’ on earth. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person.

Jesus was poor. He was from Nazareth, a village of between 200 to 2,000 people, about 7 km. away from Sepphoris, a city of 40,000. And He would have gone through the process of socialization which anyone does who lives in a village under the shadow of the big town. He is described as a *tekton* or manual worker ("carpenter" in many translations). "A *tekton* was at the lower end of the peasant class, more marginalized than a peasant who owned a small piece of land. We should not think of a *tekton* as being a step up from a subsistence farmer; rather, a *tekton* belonged to a family that had lost its land”. The problem was that the Jewish authorities insisted that the tithes were still paid, and these could amount to around 20% of agricultural income. But the Romans added their own heavy taxation system on top of this. Farmers had to pay a 1% land tax, plus a 12% crop tax on produce, as well as various other custom, toll and tribute taxes. For those who wished to be obedient to the Government as well as the Jewish law, there was a total taxation of around 35%. Those who could no longer pay their taxes to Rome lost their land, and a *tekton* was one in this class. It has been noted: “Some peasants who were forced from their lands turned to carpentry as a profession”. A case has even been made that the term "Abba" ['daddy'] was specifically "from lower class Palestinian piety". If

this is so, then we see yet another window into the poverty of the Lord Jesus, extending even to the kind of language He used to address His Father in prayer. So Jesus was Himself marginalized, the poorest of the poor [perhaps because of paying all the required taxes and not being dishonest], in one of the poorest corners of the Roman empire. The poor needn't think of Jesus as so Heavenly that He doesn't know their crises; the crises that come from not having food or money, the problems of drought, the worry about the weather, the rains not coming, the problem of broken equipment and worn out clothes and shoes, the distress that a little brother is sick, there's medicine in the nearby town, but no money for it...He *knows*. He really does. He can and does relate to all this. And it's why He is so especially watchful, according to His own teaching, of how we respond to those in such need. It means a lot to Him; because as a poor man, He must have known what it was to receive charity, to be given a few eggs by a neighbour, some milk from a kind woman down the street. When He taught "Blessed are the poor... the hungry", He immediately had a realness and credibility. For all the poor want to be better off. But He was so self-evidently content with who He was. The poor also want a bit more security for the future than just knowing that they have enough food for today. Yet Jesus could teach people to pray only for the food they needed for each day. And they were to forgive their debtors. This was radical stuff for people who lived a generally hand to mouth existence as day labourers and subsistence farmers. Only if Jesus was real and credible would people have flocked to hear Him and taken His teaching seriously. The fact He preached to the poor was a sign that He was indeed Messiah (Lk. 7:22); the context of that passage suggests it was something totally unusual, that a religious leader should bother with the poor. Serious religion was some kind of hobby for those rich enough to be able to spare the time for it. But Jesus turned all this upside down; He, the poor man, preached to the poor, and showed them that God and salvation was truly for them more than anyone else.

Is not his mother called Mary- It has been suggested that the title “son of Mary” given to Him in Mk. 6:3 implied that they considered Him illegitimate- for men were usually called by their father’s name. ““Jesus, son of Mary” has a pejorative sense… [there is a] Jewish principle: A man is illegitimate when he is called by his mother’s name”. The perception of the surrounding world may have influenced Joseph, and must have surely given rise to at least temptations of doubt within Mary as the years went by. See on Mk. 3:21. It has also been observed that it was unusual for the villagers to describe Jesus as “the son of Mary” (Mk. 6:3)- even if Joseph were dead, He would have been known as Jesus-ben-Joseph. It could well be that this was a reflection of their perception of how closely linked Jesus was to His mother. According to Talmudic writings like *Yebamot* 78b, Dt. 23:3 was interpreted as meaning that a fatherless man wasn’t allowed to enter the temple or marry a true Israelite. The

reference to Jesus as “son of Mary” (Mk. 6:3) rather than “son of Joseph” is, apparently, very unusual. It reflects the Lord’s lack of social identity in first century Israel; He had no father’s house to belong to. In passing, the jibe in Mt. 27:64 “the last deception shall be worse than the first” is likely a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the “first deception”.

And his brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?
- The Greek *a-delphos* literally means 'connected to the [same] womb'. Whilst it is true to say that the term is used for close relatives as well as blood brothers, the idea is still present of very physical natural connection. If Mary had no other children (as the Catholics claim) or the Lord Jesus personally pre-existed (as most Protestants claim) or only passed through Mary's body as a pre-existent Angel (the Watchtower's version of pre-existence), then surely another Greek word would have been used apart from *adelphos*. This whole passage speaks eloquently and deeply of the Lord's humanity and cannot be easily explained away by Trinitarians or believers in a personal pre-existence of Christ.

This makes it apparent that Mary the mother of James and Joses is clearly enough Mary the mother of Jesus- for He had brothers of those names. She had followed Him to Cana, and she faithfully followed Him to the cross. But Rev. 14:4 alludes to all this by saying that all the redeemed follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Thus Mary and the ministering women, following even to the cross, become typical of us all. Not only following the Lord in popularity, but also in the real and radical demands of His cross.

13:56 *And his sisters, are they not all with us?*- The intention of using this particular phrase was probably to hint that the Lord's sisters were 'with' the local population in their cynicism about Jesus. *Pros* definitely can carry the idea of 'on our side', 'pro'.

From where then did this man get all these things?- As in :54 "Whence...". We note their sense that "wisdom" had to be imparted from outside a person. Their perception was that there were bodies of wisdom that could be passed on to disciples / learners. But they had never noted Jesus for studying in any particular rabbinic school, nor following any sage. He was a secular, working man- not a religious freak. Therefore they found it hard to grasp from where He had got His understanding. The idea that a man could study God's word, have a personal relationship with God and learn direct from God was very strange to them. They considered that truth and wisdom had to be passed on from man to man, not discovered personally. And that attitude is alive and well today. 'What

Bible School did you finish?' becomes more important than an individual's relationship with the Lord and direct learning from Him.

13:57 *And they were offended by him*- He was a stumbling block to Israel generally, and particularly to His own neighbours. When He taught terrible judgment for those who make others stumble, He must have spoken with acute awareness that He too would make others stumble. *En autos,* "in / by Him", grammatically means that He was the instrumentality of their stumbling. The point is that He did not do this intentionally, and the fault for the stumbling was with the stumbler. In some things we all make some stumble, James comments (James 3:2). When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. In essence, the same is happening to Trinitarians. They just can't hack that Jesus, Son of God, perfect human being... was truly human, with a human brother, mother and relatives. And so they have stumbled off into various wrong theories and theologies about Jesus to try to rationalize and spiritually legitimise their lack of faith in Him as a human person. When He declared Himself as Messiah, the people who had grown up with Him were scandalized (Mk. 6:3 Gk.). He was *so* human that even though He never sinned, the people who intimately knew Him for 30 years thought that He was truly one of them. In our making the word flesh, we tend to irritate people by our apparent righteousness, or turn them away from us by our hypocrisy. But the Lord truly made the word flesh, to the extent that the very dregs of society could relate to Him as one of them. There is a wonder in this that requires sustained meditation. If He indeed was God, a Divine comet which hit this world for 33 years and sped off again, then the depth of His humanity was nothing less than a cruel deception.

But Jesus said to them: A prophet is not without honour- We need to ask *why* this is so true. In the first century Palestinian world, a person wasn’t defined so much by ‘who they were’ as by ‘whom they belonged to and where they originated from’. Hence their problem with seeing that the Lord had access to wisdom and power which they did not have as a group. He didn’t get that from them- and this confused them and their lack of understanding it turned to anger with Him. He had become different to them, therefore He was not of them- so they reasoned. And yet He *was* of them- the record stresses that they were His natural *patris*(“country”) and *oikos* (“family”). This is the same problem

as Trinitarians have- they can't see that the Lord could have what He had, and yet be one of us, of our human nature. And perhaps that partly explains their frequently observed anger with non-Trinitarian Christians. This proverb is quoted again in Jn. 4:44 but in a different sense. The Lord is recorded as leaving Judea and going to Galilee exactly because a prophet has no honour in "His own country". Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, not in Galilee. It could be that He went to Galilee from Judea because the "country" He had in mind here in quoting this proverb was Bethlehem, rather than Nazareth. And yet in Mt. 13:57 He uses this proverb about Nazareth. Perhaps this explains His deep amazement at His rejection now in Nazareth- see on :58.

Except in his hometown and in his own house [hold]- We have yet another evidence of the Lord's humanity, in that He talked of His own family of origin, which included His blood brothers and sisters of the previous verses. But He has just spoken of Himself as the 'householder', the head of the family / house (see on 13:27,52). Clearly enough, He is contrasting His spiritual family with His natural family. That group of mixed up, doubting and misunderstanding men and women who followed Him- had replaced His family of origin as His real family.

13:58 *And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief*- He could not do a mighty work in Nazareth because of their unbelief- as if He would have done a mighty miracle greater than the few healings He did perform there, but that possibility was discounted by their lack of faith (Mk. 6:5,6). Although the Lord at times healed people who had no faith (e.g. the blind man who didn't even know who the Son of God was), yet it seems that the Lord in this context wanted to see faith before healing people. Thus we see His sensitivity in operating in a different way with different people. Sometimes He does things for people *in order that* they might come to faith; in other contexts, He will only do things for people if they first have faith. It would seem therefore that He expected faith from His family and neighbours, seeing that they knew Him. Mk. 6:6 adds the comment that the Lord was "amazed" at their unbelief- the only time we hear of Him being 'amazed'. Yet given His penetrating psychological insight into people, surely He could have guessed at the response in Nazareth? His amazement would therefore seem to be a reflection of His supreme *hopefulness* for people- a characteristic which makes the Lord so altogether lovely and such a powerful example to us.

CHAPTER 14

14:1 *At that time Herod the tetrarch*- Literally, 'one of a fourth'; a reference to how after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC, the kingdom was divided amongst four others.

Heard the report concerning Jesus- A play on words: *akouo... akoe*. The Lord has recently used the same word play in saying that unbelievers "By hearing shall hear [same two Greek words] and shall not understand" (Mt. 13:14). The connection may be to demonstrate that pagan Herod was no better than the unbelieving Jewish religious leaders. Even in the Old Testament, unbelieving Israel are often described in terms of the Gentile world. We can also note that the Gospels were designed for memorization, and such word plays are common in order to assist committing them to memory. The Gospels likewise should be the lifeblood of all serious Christian living and thinking in this age of electronic memory.

14:2 *And said to his servants: This is John the Baptist!*- The people thought that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected (Mk. 6:14). Perhaps this was because they looked somehow similar, as cousins?

He has risen from the dead- The idea of bodily resurrection was around in the first century, but very often in the sense of a dead person not really dying but returning *redivivus* in another form. This was widely believed about Nero- and there are allusions to the legend of Nero *redivivus* in Revelation (they are deconstructed there as being untrue- the ultimate resurrection was of the Lord Jesus, not Nero). Herod's words show that a 'resurrected' person was expected to do great miracles as proof of their resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was likewise accompanied by "mighty works"- but not by Him personally, but by the community of believers. This accommodation to contemporary views of resurrection was therefore a way of demonstrating that the believers doing the miracles after the Lord's resurrection were being presented to society as Jesus *redivivus*; as if they truly were the body of Jesus revived. Which of course they were, and we are. Paul uses the same Greek word translated "show forth themselves" to describe how the Lord Jesus worked through both Peter and himself through the doing of miracles (Gal. 2:8; 3:5).

And therefore do these powers work in him- The Greek could more likely mean 'the powers', a reference to the popular beliefs in various 'powers' rather than one God. Jn. 10:41 is plain that "John did no miracle", and yet such was the evident spirituality of John that the theory quickly arose that the miracles of Jesus were really being done by John *redivivus*.

14:3 *For Herod had arrested John and bound him*- 'Laid hands on'. The Greek means just that, but it is possibly mistranslated in Jn. 20:23: "Whosoever sins you retain ['lay hands on'], they are retained". The idea is that we can in some cases obtain forgiveness for others' sins; but we must beware lest we lay hands on their sin and commit it ourselves. This is exactly the teaching of Jude- to reclaim others who are in sin, whilst being careful not to become contaminated by their sins rubbing off on us. Herod and his servants (:2) had laid hold on John, bound him, and cast him into prison. These are all terms used elsewhere about how the Lord Jesus will do exactly the same in condemning people at the last day. His servants (Mt. 22:13) shall lay hold of them (Rev. 20:2), bind them (Mt. 22:13) and cast them into prison (condemnation- Mt. 18:30). And these terms are also used about what happened to the Lord Jesus in His death: laid hold on by servants at a king's command (s.w. Mt. 26:4,48,50,57) bound (Jn. 18:12), to prison (Lk. 22:33). Herod is therefore being set up here as an anti-Christ, a fake Christ. And the Lord's death is again described in similar terms to that of John, whose ministry He continued. The way disciples came seeking the body is another point of connection. As events unfolded with the Lord's arrest and binding, He would've surely perceived the connection with John. And would've likewise seen how He was as it were going through the process of condemnation, being treated as a sinner, although He was not one. This means that He has even more so the right to condemn men, because in essence He knows the condemnation process. And it gives Him the ability to identify with those who in this life are currently under condemnation for their sins, and seek to lead them out of that position.

And put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife- Josephus claims that she was in fact married to another relative, not Philip, before she married Herod (*Antiquities* 18:136). We can simply decide to trust the Biblical record over Josephus. Or it could be that Josephus refers to a previous relationship she had. See on 14:10 for another conflict with Josephus.

14:4 *For John had said to him: It is not lawful for you to have her*- The laws of Lev. 18:16; 20:21 were applicable to Jews; which opens the wider question as to whether we ought to be drawing the attention of the world to their disobedience to Biblical principles, even though they do not claim any faith in the Bible. Criticizing others' ways of living leads to anger if the point isn't accepted; and we have a classic case of it here. The Herods were from Idumea, but although they weren't ethnic Jews, they claimed to be religious Jews. So it could be that John's attitude was that if someone considered themselves as being under God's law, then they should be obedient to it and were therefore culpable before Him for disobedience to it. In this case, we do not actually have here any reason to think that a Christian's duty is to lobby the unbelieving world leaders to be obedient to God's law.

14:5 *And though he wanted to put him to death*- The same Greek words used about Herod wanting to kill Jesus in Lk. 13:31.

He feared the people- Another similarity with the plans of the Jewish leadership to kill Jesus, and being frustrated by "the crowd" because they counted him as a prophet (the very same words are used in Mt. 21:46); see on 14:3 *laid hold on*. These similarities between the deaths of John and Jesus draw a parallel between the despised Gentile Herod (regarding John and the Jewish leadership (regarding Jesus). Yet again, highly religious, legalistic people who have rejected the spirit of Jesus are equated with the very worst of the Gentiles.

Because they held him to be a prophet- As made explicit in chapters 12 and 13, the crowds did not accept the essential message of John- but they fiercely defended him as a prophet, speaking God's word. Acceptance of an inspired word is one thing, but to grasp the essence of the Lord Jesus is quite another.

A manipulative woman arranging the death of a prophet through a weak willed ruler recalls Jezebel in 1 Kings 21; and she was a protagonist of Elijah, upon whom John the Baptist was clearly modelled.

14:7 *Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatever she should ask*- This continues a theme we find in the book of Daniel- powerful rulers making a rash oath and feeling forced to carry it out because of shame and the pressure of courtiers. The contrast with God, the ultimate ruler, is not that He is not so rash and not manipulated by His subjects. Rather the contrast is surely that Yahweh *does* change, He has no fear of shame or being shamed; such is His grace that when He sees a repentant Nineveh, He *does* change His original intention. The fear of shame and pressure from the eyes of others is what leads so many leaders into behaviour and positions which are against their better judgment. There is no shame in change. Indeed, change is part of real spirituality.

Mk. 6:23 adds "Up to half my kingdom". This is alluding to the king's promise to Esther in Esther 5:23, but it seems an allusion with no context or specific meaning, for Herodias was not at all Esther.

14:8 *And she, being encouraged by her mother, said: Give me here*- The emphasis on "here" is strange. She wanted the head brought in before everyone. This rather strongly contradicts Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, a long way from Herod's court.

The head of John the Baptist on a platter- The feast would have been full of plates with various dishes. The idea was that the head would be offered for eating. The implication is that the head would've been brought immediately, which suggests that John was imprisoned nearby. This again

rules out Josephus' claim that John was beheaded in the Machaerus fortress, far from Herod's palace in Tiberias. The offering of a head on a platter is full of allusion to pagan ritual. Herod, as one who claimed to be an observant Jew, was now forced to choose- between being a serious Jew, following Divine principle, or a pagan. He was forced to decide- and chose wrongly. He had earlier wanted to kill John, and now his evil thought was being brought to action, in a powerful outworking of the Lord's principle that the thought is indeed counted as the action. We ask, naturally, why it all had to be as it was. John would've carefully reflected upon the life of Elijah, and John would've seen the parallel between Jezebel and the manipulative women behind his own death- and taken comfort from that in his last moments: that he was in fact the Elijah prophet.

14:9 *And the king was grieved*- And yet we learnt in :5 that Herod had wanted to kill John because John had criticized Herod's lifestyle. We may feel flushes of anger against a person, but if it were to come to actually carrying out what we imagine- we would likely regret it.

But for the sake of his oaths and of his dinner guests, he commanded it to be given- A *horkos* was not merely a verbal promise; although he was not ethnically Jewish, Herod claimed to be a practicing Jew, and an 'oath' would've been something like 'May I be eternally condemned at the last day if I do not...'. Peter used the same oaths in denying the Lord. And so we see the torture of this unhappy man- asking himself to be condemned if he didn't do something which surely warrants eternal condemnation. The only way out was to *change*, to re-pent, to re-think; to recognize that he was not going to get out of this without a deep repentance.

14:10 *He sent word and had John beheaded in the prison*- The implication is that the court party was held close to the prison. This would have been most unlikely if Josephus is correct in claiming that John was imprisoned and beheaded in the fortress of Machaerus. Herod's court was in Tiberias. See on 14:3. The implication of the language is that Herod took full responsibility for this- as if he personally beheaded John. And he realized this later in his conscience: "John whom I beheaded… John have I beheaded" (Mk. 6:16; Lk. 9:9).

14:11 *And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother*- The Greek for "brought" is used only four times in Matthew, twice in this verse, and three times in this chapter. The Lord uses the word of how He wished the loaves and fishes to be "brought" to Him for His Messianic banquet (Mt. 14:18). It may be that Herod's banquet is being set up in contrast to that of the Lord Jesus described later in the chapter.

14:12 *And his disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him*- The phrase is only used elsewhere about Joseph taking up the body of the

Lord Jesus after His death (Jn. 19:31,38). And doing the same with it- burying it. He was likely one of the followers of John the Baptist, and his fine action here was surely motivated by the memory of those brave brethren who 'took up the body' of John. The example of devotion shown by believers can inspire later believers in different contexts. The power of example is far greater than we can ever imagine.

And they went and told Jesus- The same Greek words are found in Jn. 20:18. Here, after the 'taking up of the body' of the Lord Jesus and 'burying' it, just as had been done to John's corpse, Mary "went and told" the disciples. The disciples "went and told Jesus" of John's death; now, Mary goes to tell the disciples of the Lord's resurrection. The similarity of language and yet the inversion of the ideas is all surely intentional. The intention is to show that the tragedy of John's death was vindicated and gloriously reversed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

14:13 *Now when Jesus heard this*- Therefore the feeding of the five thousand came some time before the parables of chapter 13, and is not in chronological sequence; it is part of the flashback to John's death. Perhaps the intention is to present the Lord's banquet as the antithesis of Herod's banquet which led to John's execution. We see here yet another insight into the Lord's humanity. Knowledge of John's death wasn't beamed into the Lord's mind; He didn't have the total omniscience of God. For He was not God Himself, but the human Son of God. He had to be informed of some things before He knew them. And He reacts in a very human way- He wants to go away on His own with His closest friends to reflect upon the death of a relative and co-worker. But again, in a typically human way, His plan to have time out relatively alone was thwarted- despite His intention to get away alone, or at least just with His close friends, the crowds heard He had been spotted heading out to an uninhabited area, and followed Him there by foot.

He withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place to be alone- Lk. 9:10 says that it was near to Bethsaida. This indicates the literal accuracy of the Gospels, because Bethsaida was just outside the boundary of Herod's jurisdiction, and it would be understandable that after his execution of John, the disciples and Jesus might want to be outside of his territory.

But when the crowds heard, they followed him on foot from the cities- This is added to demonstrate their commitment to hearing Him teach. Why were they so keen to make such effort to get to Him? Mt. 13:54-58 records how the Lord taught in the synagogue but didn't get a good response, nor did He do many miracles there because of their unbelief. But now He leaves, and the people flock after Him. This may be understandable just in terms of basic psychology- when a wonderful offer is not taken up but appears to be receding, people then desperately grab onto it. Perhaps that's why the Lord seems well disposed to these people-

healing and feeding them (see on :22). But we also get the impression that the Lord was not constantly available for teaching and healing. I have previously remarked that the intensity of some of the days which the Gospels record was surely not repeated every day of His ministry. It seems He spent most of His time training the twelve and only occasionally made public appearances to teach and heal.

The Lord in Jn. 6 comments upon their efforts. The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own. The people had walked all round the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. In typical style, He responded: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (Jn. 6:27). They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking round the lake. We like those crowds want to concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and "him hath God the Father sealed", i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true.

14:14 *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd*- We could picture Him hiding away in some cave or bush, noticing the crowds combing the area, having spotted the abandoned boat. And then battling with a desire to

retreat further into the bush away from them, or to send them away- but instead having compassion on them and going out to meet them with teaching and healing. But that is unlikely the right reading, because Mk. 6:33 notes that some of the people who ran around the lake got to the destination before they did. The 'coming forth' would therefore have been coming forth from the boat to land. That moment is perhaps noted because the obvious inclination would have been to sail further and find a better resting place, far from this irritating crowd.

And he had compassion on them and healed their sick- Mark adds the reason- "because they were as sheep having no shepherd" (Mk. 6:34). His pity was therefore for their spiritual state rather than their material need. This being 'moved with compassion' is a major characteristic of the Lord which the Gospel writers noticed (s.w. Mt. 9:36; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34 in Matthew alone- see too Lk. 7:13; 10:33; 15:20). The Greek speaks of a literal movement within the ribcage, as if the Lord's actual body was moved by the compassion He felt. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday, today and at the day of judgment- and forever. This same basic pity is part of Him, as it is of His Father- and it must be with us too. Several times when we read of the Lord showing such pity, it is in the context of others *not* doing so. In this instance, the disciples don't want to feed the hungry people; and likewise in Mt. 15:32. In Mt. 18:27 the compassion of the Lord to His indebted servant was not reciprocated by that servant; the Samaritan of the parable had compassion when the priest and Levite did not (Lk. 10:33); the Father had compassion on the prodigal son when the older brother did not (Lk. 15:20). Such compassion is therefore an act of the will, rather than a streak some are born with. We can shut up our "bowels of compassion" against human need (1 Jn. 3:17), we have to "put on… bowels of mercies" (Col. 3:12).

14:15 *And when evening had come, the disciples came to him, saying*- The implication is that they weren't standing by Him, but rather watching cynically from a distance. Which explains their harsh attitude to the crowds. After all, they too had been followers of John the Baptist, they too wanted to get away on their own to mourn the news of His death. They probably felt the Lord should've sent away the multitudes from the start. It's not hard to sense that the record paints the disciples negatively at this time. But who wrote this record? The Gospels are transcripts of how the disciples preached the Gospel. Despite the process of inspiration, the disciples in their recounting of the Gospel repeatedly mentioned their own weakness, and thereby would've come over as all the more credible to their audience. And in this we see a fine pattern for our own witness.

This place is deserted and the day is now over- AV "The time is now past". "Past" translates *parerchomai*; the Lord uses a similar word in replying that "they need not *depart*"- *aperchomai*. This word choice not

only aided memorization of the Gospel record. The disciples considered that time had more than gone, that it was inevitable that the Lord must now send the crowd away, and should've done earlier. But He is saying that actually He is not limited by time, the time didn't have to be "past"; because He was not limited by food either, and could feed them.

Send the crowds away- Twice they wanted to turn away those who wished to come to Jesus, and whom He wished to accept (Mt. 14:15; 15:23). As with the two miracles of bread, the second incident was giving them the opportunity to learn the lesson from the first incident- and yet they failed. Likewise they "forbad" John's disciples just as they wrongly "forbad" the little children to come to Him (Lk. 9:50).

That they may go into the villages and buy for themselves food- Seeing most of the people were poor, and were likely subsistence farmers, it is most unlikely they had money to buy food. And 5000 men plus women and children would've meant a crowd of 10,000 at least- the few shops in those tiny hamlets would've been totally unable to provide for them. Here again we see the insensitivity of the disciples being related in the narrative which they themselves told after the resurrection. The apparently redundant "buy *themselves*" may suggest the disciples' bitterness and resentment at the apparent expectation of the crowd that the Lord was to provide food for them. The only other time we meet the phrase is when the wise virgins tell the foolish to go and 'buy for themselves', and refuse to give their oil to them. Perhaps the Lord built that phrase into the parable because the disciples had earlier used it- and by His provision, He had effectively rebuked them for doing so.

14:16 *But Jesus said to them: They need not go away*- See on :15 *the time is now past*. They ask the Lord to send the multitude away (Mk. 6:36), whereas Jesus later taught by word and example, that whoever came to Him He would not turn away (Jn. 6:37). Mark and Matthew present themselves, the disciples, as seriously out of step with their Lord at this time. And surely the communities which they were establishing were likewise tempted to 'send away' or deny fellowship to those whom the Lord would have them fellowship.

You give them something to eat- According to Jn. 6:5, the Lord also asked: "From whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?". Even if money was no issue, the village shops simply had nowhere near the amount of food required. So in "You give them…", the stress was not only on the word "you". Perhaps it was more so on the word and concept of "give", standing as it does in contrast to the disciples' unrealistic and harsh expectation that these poor people go to a village and *buy* food. Surely the Lord had in mind Is. 55:1,2: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food". He intended the disciples to see the connection and to figure that He would even provide them with free food, because they were seeking His word. We are confirmed in this idea by the way that He appealed to the crowd in the same discourse: "Labour not for the food which perishes" (Jn. 6:27), which is surely an allusion to Is. 55:2. Perhaps the disciples got the point- perhaps not. Often the Lord sets us up with situations in which we are intended to have our minds sent back to a Biblical verse or precedent as encouragement and guidance for us in our decisions. Whether or not we grasp it is a matter partly of our familiarity with the text of Scripture, but more significantly, our openness to this kind of spiritual prompting, and the idea of God's word being part of a living, two-way dialogue between Him and ourselves.

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

When the Lord calmly bid them feed the huge crowd with just a few loaves ("How many loaves have ye? Go and see" (Mk. 6:38)), we are left to imagine those men, almost paralysed and certainly gobsmacked by the extent of the demand, awkwardly going away to count their few loaves. He could be seen as a demanding Lord. The Lord Jesus said many "hard sayings" which dissuaded people from seriously following Him. He kept speaking about a condemned criminal's last walk to his cross, and telling people they had to do this. He told them, amidst wondrous stories of flowers and birds, to rip out their eyes, cut off their limbs- and if they didn't, He didn't think they were serious and would put a stone round their neck and hurl them into the sea (Mk. 9:42-48). He healed a leper, and then spoke sternly to Him (Mk. 1:43 AV mg.).

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding, the Lord asked the disciples where "*we*" could get food from to feed them

(Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise.

The disciples, in John's record, complain: "From whence shall *we* find bread in the wilderness?". The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

14:17 *And they say to him: We have here only five loaves and two fishes*- Jn. 6:9 says that they said: "There is a lad here, which has five barley loaves and two small fishes". The boy out of the crowd gave the bread to the disciples- for now, the bread is no longer 'his', but belongs to 'the disciples'. Then they gave it to Jesus. He then gives it back to the disciples, and they give it back to the crowd, including to the boy. We see in this cycling around of the bread an eloquent picture of the Lord's humanity. What little the crowd of humanity had was taken by the Lord and transformed by Him into what could save them; and in this sense, the bread was 'sent down' from Heaven, in John's terms, even though it was a recycling of the peoples' own bread.

The very human perspective of the disciples is almost predictably brought out by their response to the Lord's question to them about where to get bread to feed the hungry crowd. "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient" was Philip's response (Jn. 6:7). Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '…and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's

extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom, right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

14:18 *And he said: Bring them here to me*- The word "here" would appear to be redundant in terms of the meaning if the Lord simply meant 'OK, give them to Me'. He wanted to focus the disciples upon the need for His personal presence and involvement with whatever we are willing to give Him. The loaves and fishes had to be brought *here*, to Him, and the miracle would proceed only once they were in His hands.

14:19 *And he commanded the crowds to sit down on the grass; and he took the five loaves and the two fishes and*- The zoom of Matthew's camera is now very close up. We are invited to play 'Bible television' with the language and re-live it all again.

Looking up to Heaven- This detail not only suggests the close fellowship enjoyed between the Father and Son, to the extent that the Lord could pray with open eyes looking up to Heaven, knowing there was no barrier between Him and God. But we also as it were have the camera zoomed in upon the Lord, yet another indication that we have in the Gospels an eye witness account. Likewise the Lord's way of looking up was noticed in Lk. 19:5; 21:1.

He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples and the disciples to the crowds- Clearly the record is structured to show how the Lord worked through them. In giving the bread of life to the world, the Lord usually works through some kind of human mechanism rather than as it were parachuting His word and salvation directly to a person. There was no word from the Lord that He had performed the miracle of multiplication- the disciples had to go forth in faith and start distributing the bread and fish. Presumably He broke the five loaves into 12 parts, and the two fish likewise. The disciples, each holding a small piece of

bread and fish in their hands, in turn went to the crowds and broke it further- and never ran out. It was indeed a sign of their faith that they participated, risking looking foolish as they first began. This is indeed an accurate picture of our fears as we go out into this world with the Lord's salvation.

Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers.

14:20 *And they all ate*- See the special section about the openness of Jesus.

And were filled- Perhaps alluding to Dt. 8:10, "you shall eat and be full".

And they collected what was left over- Eph. 1:8 talks of how God has lavished or abounded His grace upon us. The same word is used about the Lord not only made miraculous loaves and fishes, but there was so much that abounded ("what was left") that it filled twelve baskets. Why did the Lord do that, and why make the disciples pick up all those crumbs? Surely to give them an object lesson in how God delights in abounding to us. He didn't just give the people food; He abounded to them. The record of each of the feeding miracles, in each of the Gospels, uses this word translated "remained" in commenting about the fragments that were left over- although the real meaning is 'to abound'. Each of the Gospel writers was therefore deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord not only provided food- but such an abundance. All this sets the background for Paul's use of the very same word to describe how God's grace has "abounded" to us in Christ (Rom. 3:7; 5:15; Eph. 1:8).

Of the broken pieces- Why this feature in both the feeding miracles? In Mt. 16:9,10, the Lord asks the disciples to recall how many baskets they took up after each miracle- in order to help them to show faith in another time of need. The details of the Lord's past actions with us need to be remembered- because they are designed to fortify us in future tests of faith. We sense that all along, the Lord was working with the disciples (just as He does with us) according to a specific program, tailor made for them, designed to lead them from one spiritual level to another whilst re-enforcing the points learnt.

Twelve baskets- A different word to that used in the feeding of the 4000 in Mt. 15:37. This here in 14:20 is the smaller basket, used for carrying ritually clean food when in Gentile areas.

14:21 *And they that ate, besides women and children, were about five thousand men*- It is tempting to try to work out some significance in the figures here and in the feeding of the 4000 recorded in Mt. 15. Five loaves and two fishes fed 5000 with 12 baskets taken up; seven loaves and a few fishes fed 4000 with seven baskets taken up. With the food distributed each time by 12 disciples. One observation would be that the total number of loaves used was 12, which was the number of loaves required for the showbread (Lev. 24:5). The loaves in totality represent the Lord Jesus, the bread of God's presence in Israel, offered to all and sundry- not just to the priests. The Lord had made the same point in reminding Israel that David and his men had eaten the showbread- the things considered exclusively for the religious elite were now open to all, women and kids and Gentiles included. The very same Greek phrase "about five thousand men" occurs in Acts 4:4, to describe the total number of converts made by the disciples in the very early days of the church. Surely there must be some connection here. As the disciples moved amongst the crowds, each of them repeatedly breaking the bread of Christ to the multitudes, they were being trained towards the day when they would move amongst other multitudes preaching Christ and baptizing people into Him. It would seem that there were two major incidents when the disciples preached and performed mass baptisms; the 3000 in Acts 2:41, and then either 2000 or 5000 (depending how one reads the Greek) in Acts 4:4. These days of mass baptisms were probably never repeated in the history of the early church; and so the two feeding miracles were to prepare them for those two later incidents. In our yearning to attach meaning to event, we too can be encouraged that what we currently cannot understand is likely preparation for some potential future calling for us at some point in the future.

Beside women and children- AV. The Greek for "beside" can carry the sense of being separate from physically, as if the men were seated in a slightly different place to the women and children- which is just how a Middle Eastern feeding scheme would be run to this day.

14:22 *Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the sea, while he dismissed the crowds*- Jn. 6:15 says that the crowds wanted to "take him by force to make Him a king". Yet these were the same folk, it seems, who had showed little real faith in Him previously- see on :13*on foot*. They were so fickle. They evidently saw the connection between the feeding miracle and Him being Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was that He was to be a King offering immediate salvation. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:9 claimed that "...as the former redeemer caused manna to descend... so will the latter

redeemer cause manna to descend". We get the impression that the Lord felt under a sense of great urgency- He "constrained" the disciples to get into the boat and leave, whilst He sent the crowd away. Perhaps He felt that the crowd intended to make Him King and the disciples the leaders of their new *junta*, but by sending the disciples away, He was greatly reducing the chances of them doing this. However the other reason was simply that the disciples themselves were looking for an immediate kingdom and glory, and He knew the temptation would be too great for them. He likewise works with us so often to deliver us from temptation He knows is too great for us.

The Lord told them to sail to the other side of the lake, but said that they would be 'going before / ahead of Him'. The Greek could suggest that His words could have been understood as meaning that they would sail to that place, He would send the crowds away, and then go behind them- i.e., walking on the water. Of course, they could have understood 'going before Him' as meaning that He would join them there at a later stage. But as they sailed away, they must have debated whatever He meant. Because if He meant that He would join them there at a later stage, however was He going to walk there around the lake, whilst so desperately wanting the crowds to go away from Him? Remember He had no personal boat, and they were in a deserted location. Whichever exit He took, whichever way He walked around the lake, He would have the very people with Him whom He was so earnestly trying to avoid. Again, as in asking *them* to *give* and not *buy* food for the crowd, the Lord was stretching them. He wanted them to reflect upon His words, and if they had done, then logically they were intended to come to the conclusion that He was implying that He would walk over the water to them. And if they were Old Testament minded, they would have known the passages which spoke of Yahweh walking upon the water and the waves of the sea (Ps. 29:3,10; 77:19; Nah. 1:3; Hab. 3:15). When, therefore, the waves arose and they seemed likely to drown, they were intended to figure that He would come to them, manifesting Yahweh, walking upon the waves of the sea- to save them. Whether any of them did actually get that far in perception and faith seems doubtful. But I believe we can discern how the Lord was seeking to lead them and educate their faith. The tragedy is that so many of His detailed plans for us are likewise wasted because of our lack of spiritual perception, and allowing the immediacy of issues to obscure the clear light of His leadership through life.

However, Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

14:23 *And after he had dismissed the crowds*- The phrase is repeated as in :22, probably in recognition of the miracle performed in managing to send these crowds away empty handed, with no visible Messianic Kingdom. At least, the power of personality in the Lord was very great to be able to get Himself out of this situation.

He went up the mountain by himself to pray- The term *kata idios* ["by himself"] is used about 16 times in the Gospels, covering around 12 different occasions. The need to be alone with the Lord or with the Father is therefore a significant theme. The Lord had departed to the deserted place because of this need to be *kata idios* (:13), but His plans were thwarted by the unexpected tenacity of the crowd in following Him there. In this we see another picture of His humanity. But ultimately, God granted Him the need He felt to be *kata idios*, to be alone with God. Perhaps one reason He so insistently sent both the crowd and the disciples away was because He knew He simply had to be alone with God. And there can be times like this for us too. No matter how stupid we might appear in secular life, there can be a time when you just have to go and sit in the toilet for 5 minutes in your lunch break and pray. The Lord uses the term in speaking of how we are each given something very personal which we are to use in His service- *kata idios*, 'alone by ourselves', or as in AV "according to his several ability" (Mt. 25:15). Each sheep is called by the Lord *kata idios*, AV "by name" (Jn. 10:3). And therefore the judgment of each believer will be *kata idios*, AV "according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8). There is a very wide range of translations of this phrase. But the idea is that we were each individually called by the Lord and given different callings, and our judgment will be according to this. This is not to say that there is anything other than one basic faith, Gospel, Hope, Lord etc. But in many denominations and fellowships the idea is pushed that each believer must adopt an identical, detailed statement of understanding and calling. Yet in practice, the frames of our calling and the Lord's hopes for our responses vary significantly between individuals.

The fact the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father is one of the profoundest and logically strongest evidences that He was not God in any Trinitarian sense. The basic facts of the Gospel records were simply not given their full weight by the unBiblical politicians who first created the Trinity doctrine. The liberal theologian Hal Taussig observes that other theologians haven't written much about Jesus at prayer- for this very reason, that of itself it contradicts Trinitarian dogma: "Because Jesus at prayer confuses theological categories of "divine" and "human" (is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?), theologians have rarely been interested in Jesus at prayer" (Hal Taussig, *Jesus Before God: The Prayer Life of the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: The Polebridge Press, 1999) p. 7). Taussig's question "is there any need for a divine Jesus to pray?" is ultimately impossible for Trinitarian apologists to answer.

When evening came, he was there alone- This is a pointed repetition of the information that the Lord was there *kata idios*- alone apart, by Himself. His aloneness with God is being brought to our attention. Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray… He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough.* Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

14:24 *But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them*- People at that time had a strong association between the sea and the forces of evil and condemnation; beginning with the condemnation of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, the Bible itself speaks of condemnation as being swamped at sea by the waves. The Egyptians perished "in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:23,27; Ez. 29:3); Jonah drowned "in the midst of the sea" (Jonah 2:3) as does the fool of Proverbs (Prov. 23:34), as did Tyre and the Gentile nations (Ez. 26:12; 27:26,27,32; 28:8; Ps. 46:2) and Babylon (Jer. 51:63). The disciples doubtless felt condemned. For there were these 12 Old Testament references to condemnation ringing in their Jewish ears. Their cry for salvation was therefore not merely for physical deliverance, but a cry for deliverance out of condemnation. They were "tossed with waves"- the very term used for the torment of the rejected (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). The disciples had earlier seen people who were tormented [s.w. "tossed"] being delivered by the Lord- to pave the way for them personally crying out for that same deliverance (s.w. Mt. 8:6).

14:25 *And in the fourth watch of the night*- Between three and six a.m. This indicates how long they had been struggling. It is the same 'watch' of

the night in which God used the sea to destroy the Egyptians and thus save His people (Ex. 14:20).

He came to them- The Greek strictly means that He departed, He left to walk over the sea to them, in the fourth watch of the night. Mk. 6:48 adds the detail that "He would have passed by them". This is often His style to this day- it's not that He plays hard to get, but He wants to elicit in us a sense of our desperation for Him. Likewise He often asked sick people what He could do for them, when it was obvious what they wanted. For the same reason on the road to Emmaus, He made as if He would have gone further- to elicit in those disciples an urgent desire for fellowship with Him. The same word translated "passed by them" had just been used by the disciples in saying that "the time is now *past*" and so the Lord should send the crowd away to feed themselves. The disciples likely realized that they were being corrected for their desire to turn away the crowds of people from the Lord; admittedly their motivation was poor, as the Lord seems to explain to them in John 6, but it was seriously wrong to turn them away.
Mk. 6:48 says that "He saw them toiling in rowing" and then, later, He went to them. He didn't literally see them rowing; but in His sensitive mind, He imagined just how it would be for them, and so He went to them.

Walking upon the sea- The Greek *peripateo* means to walk *around* (from whence 'peripatetic'], and is used about our walk of life, career, habits etc. The impression is of the Lord walking around at ease upon the waves which were so frightening to the disciples. Walking on the sea, Jesus "would have passed by them" (Mk. 6:48). I don't suppose He *would* have done, because He was 'coming unto them', but this was how they perceived it – and thus the record stands written, from a human perspective.

14:26 *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were disturbed, saying*- The word is specifically used in literature of troubled water (and in Jn. 5:4,7). The state of the water was as the state of their minds. Hence the power of the image of the Lord Jesus walking at ease upon that troubled water.

It is a ghost!- The Greek *phantasma* could refer to a ghost, in which cases we see how under pressure, disciples return quickly to their previous belief systems. But the word could equally refer to an Angel. Their fear, and that fear being met with assurance *not* to fear, would then be typical of human reaction whenever Angels appear to them. The Lord's assurance that "It is *I*" would then be yet another evidence that the Lord Jesus was not an Angel (as the Watchtower wrongly claim).

And they cried out for fear- These Greek words are only used together elsewhere in Rom. 8:15, where Paul says that we do not cry out in fear,

but rather cry "Abba, Father". This would again present the disciples at this point as condemned and far from the right relationship with the Father and Son which they should've had. The point of the incident is that they were saved out of that, by grace.

14:27 *But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying: Be of good cheer*!- They had at least twice heard the Lord comfort others with those words before healing them (Mt. 9:2,22). According to their recollection of His words, so their comfort would have been. And that principle applies to us today.

It is I- The *ego eimi* construction could be understood as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. They were to understand Him as the fulfilment of the Old Testament language of Yahweh walking upon the raging sea. “It is I” could be a quotation of the Divine Name from Is. 41:4; 43:10. It is used in that context of not fearing the power of Assyria / Babylon. The Lord wanted the disciples to perceive that the huge waves were to be met with the same faith that the faithful remnant had in the face of the opposition of superpowers against Israel. However, it needs to be asked how else the Lord could have said “It’s Me!”. There are alternatives, but this is the phrase used. And yet on the other hand, the use of *ego eimi* is not necessarily an allusion to the Divine Name, because it is found on the lips of men in 2 Sam. 2:19 LXX; Mt. 26:22,25; Jn. 1:20,27; 9:8 and Acts 22:3 (see too Lk. 1:18,19). The question is: Did the Lord really expect the disciples to perceive such Scriptural allusions in the midst of panic and crisis? And if so, what was the point? For surely they were not in the midst of a quiet Bible class evening. The point likely was and is that in the heat of crisis, the spiritually minded will unconsciously perceive spiritual nudges from the Father and Son- and thus be strengthened to endure and decide rightly in the heat of crisis.

Be not afraid- A phrase so often on the Lord's lips to the disciples. They so often feared (Lk. 8:25; 9:34,45; Mk. 4:40; 6:50; 10:32); despite the Lord repeatedly telling them not to be afraid (Lk. 12:4,32; Jn. 14:27). Despite His high demands on the one hand, on the other, He was and is ever assuring His people of His total and saving love for them. Peter uses the same phrase when he in his turn urges us to not be afraid nor 'troubled'- the very word used about the troubled disciples on the water that night (1 Pet. 3:14; Mt. 14:26). The Lord likewise leads each of us through situations in order that we might then strengthen others in those situations. Paul's teaching in 2 Cor. 1:4-8 would seem to go as far as saying that in fact *all* we experience is in order that we might later give strength to others in similar situations. And this enables us, in broad terms at least, to attach meaning to event in a way which the unbeliever simply cannot.

The Qumran *Thanksgiving Hymns* are full of reference to the true Israel being saved from drowning in the sea of Gentile nations (1 QH 3:6,12-18; 6:22-25; 7:4,5). The *Testament of Naphtali* 6:1-10 speaks of "the ship of Jacob" almost sinking in a storm, but Jacob himself walks on the water to save her. Clearly the Lord has these popular images in mind, and is recasting them- Jesus is the founder of the new Israel as Jacob was of the old, his 12 disciples are as the 12 sons of Jacob. And the faithful Israel in the boat are in fact not very faithful, they are secular, non-religious very human Jews who have come to believe in Jesus as Messiah.

How exactly was Peter motivated to walk on water? We want to know, because it's the motivation that we so urgently need. We read that the Lord "passed by". This is the very language used in the Old Testament concerning theophanies, i.e. those times when God 'passed by' before His people, accompanied by earthquake, rain, wind, fire etc. These ideas all recur here in the account of Jesus 'passing by' before the fearful disciples. In Mt. 14:27 the Lord tells them: "It is I". This was a reference to the "I am" of the Yahweh Name. Peter knew that it was Yahweh who walks upon the waves of the sea (Job 9:8), and so he asks that if Jesus is really "I am", God manifest in flesh, then He will bid Peter also walk on the water. It was Yahweh whose way was *upon* the sea (Ps. 77:19 Heb.; Ps. 29:3). Indeed, the whole incident on the lake is almost prophesied in Ps. 107. The people are hungry in desolate places (:4,5), they are filled by Yahweh with good things, as the Lord Jesus fed the multitude (:9); some go down to the sea in ships (:23); a storm arises, sent from God (:25); they are troubled and cry out (:27,28); and then Yahweh delivers them, bringing them to their desired haven (:28-30). Peter, I think, perceived all this. He saw that this Man from Nazareth was indeed manifesting Yahweh, and he is asking that he too will be a part of God's manifestation; he perceived that what was true of Jesus really could be true for us. If Jesus, manifesting Yahweh, walked upon the sea, then so could Peter. When Peter asks Jesus to "bid me come unto thee", the Greek word translated "come" is also translated "to accompany". He wanted to walk with Jesus on the water. He wanted to do what Jesus was doing. This of itself explains how the fact Jesus did what God did [e.g. walk on waves] doesn't mean He is "very God of very gods"- for Peter realized that he too could have a part in that manifestation. If Jesus was a man of our nature and yet God manifest, then, Peter reasoned, I too can manifest the Father. And the same is true for us, today. The reality of God's manifestation in the human Jesus should inspire us too to leave our comfort zones and enter the adventure of living Godly- living like God- in this present world. Peter "came down" out of the ship to go walking on water (Mt. 14:29). He is described as "coming down" [s.w.] in Acts 10:21, where he came down from the roof top and said: "Behold I am he whom ye seek; what is the cause wherefore ye are come?". "I am he" uses the same two Greek

words as in Mt. 14:27, when the Lord says “It is I”. Three Greek words occurring together like this is surely not incidental. Peter recalls when he ‘came down’ out of the ship- and now, he really is Christ-manifest. He speaks as Jesus did; and further, “I am he whom ye seek” and “wherefore [are ye] come” are the very phrases of Jesus in Gethsemane. The record is showing us that consciously or subconsciously, Peter is Christ-manifest now. The words and person of Jesus have all had such impact upon him that now for him, “to live is Christ”. To ‘come down’ and manifest Him is what life is all about; Peter’s coming down out of the ship is a cameo of a life lived like this, time and again manifesting Him, overcoming the fear, the cowardice of our brethren, the distractions of the life and world which surrounds us…to walk out unto Him.

14:28 *And Peter answered, and said: Lord, if it is you*- I suggested on Mt. 14:22 that the Lord had hinted that He would come to them walking on the water. Jn. 6:17 comments that the disciples were in the boat in the sea "and Jesus was not come to them"- suggesting He had promised to do so and they should have been looking for Him, walking on the water to them. Perhaps Peter had grasped this, and therefore reasoned that what the Lord could do, all in Him could likewise potentially be empowered to do. Another angle on Peter's question is that He realized that only the Lord would ask such a thing of His followers. No ghost, satan, Angel or other imagined entity would actually invite a disciple of Jesus to do such a thing. To challenge us to the very limit of human faith is indeed the Lord's unique and distinguishing characteristic. Yet another slant on Peter's words is provided by the consideration that the three Greek words translated "If it is you" are always used elsewhere in the Gospels about whether Jesus is indeed the Christ ("tell us *if it is you* the Christ", Mt. 26:63; Lk. 23:37,39; Jn. 1:25; 10:24). The miraculous providing of manna had been sure evidence that Jesus was indeed Messiah, the Christ. But they still doubted. But on the other hand, Peter was willing to be persuaded again, and it is to his huge credit that he obeyed the Lord's invitation to get out of the boat and walk on the water.
Mark’s account of this incident omits all reference to Peter walking on the water (Mk. 6:45-51). Yet there is good reason to think that Mark is really Peter’s gospel; in characteristic humility, he emphasizes his failures and downplays his achievements in his Gospel record. Hence this omission of any reference to Peter’s bravery may indicate that this incident places Peter in a positive light; it was a tremendous achievement, and he humbly declines to mention it.

Command me- Peter's unswerving respect for his Lord's word is seen as he looked out of that sinking ship on Galilee, battling with his own humanity as he weighed up in his own mind whether to be spiritually ambitious enough to get down into that raging water. He only felt able to

take such a leap of faith if he had Christ's word behind him. So he yelled out above the noise of the wind: "If it be thou, *bid me come* unto thee" (Mt. 14:28). In other words: 'With your word behind me, I'll have a go; without it, I won't'. How much spiritual ambition is there within us? Or do we huddle in the sides of the ship, or desperately expend our own strength to bring about our salvation, without even seeking the word of Christ? Peter's request to be bidden walk on the water was (typically) both full of faith and yet also tinged by an element of unspirituality. His words as recorded here ("If it is you, bid me come unto you on the water") appear strikingly similar to the LXX of 2 Kings 5:13, where a spiritually limited Naaman is rebuked for expecting to be asked to do something "demanding"- also connected with going into water!

To come to you- The same words are used in describing how Peter obediently 'came unto' Jesus on the water (:29). This phrase is used multiple times in the Gospels for people coming to Jesus. The crowd had 'come unto Jesus' (Jn. 6:5) and the disciples had clearly not been happy about that, and wished to send them away. The crisis on the lake was not so much the Lord's punishment of the disciples for that attitude, but rather His attempt to teach them a better attitude (see on 14:30 *sink*). Now Peter realizes the need to come to Jesus and the grace of His 'coming to' them on the lake. This is why he asks to 'come unto' Jesus, rather than simply to walk on water. Never again would He despise those who wished to come to Jesus; Peter was asking permission to do what the crowd had done, and which he had despised them for doing- namely, coming to Jesus. The Lord's discourse afterwards emphasized the need to 'come to Him' and how all who were of God would come to Him and never be turned away (Jn. 6:35,37,44,45,65). Peter's desire to come to Him made Peter typical of all disciples. The same challenge, to leave the boat and walk on water, echoes down to us all. Peter as so many others had in a sense already 'come unto' Jesus but now he perceived that he was to come to Him again, going through a level of re-conversion.

By walking on the water- The Lord walked "on the sea" (:25) but Peter asks to walk "on the water". Different words are used. I would be open to suggestion as to the significance, if any, of this difference.

In the account of Peter walking on water, we have a cameo of what it means to walk out of our comfort zone. Peter asked the man on the water to invite him to walk on the water; for Peter knew that only Jesus would be that demanding. He’s a demanding Lord for us too. Peter didn’t have to get out of the boat. But He realized that following the Lord Jesus involves this stepping out of our comfort zone. For us, it may be making a radical donation of our money, our time, a donation that really hurts, that is significant, not a giving that is well within our comfort zone. Or it may be a radical forgiveness, a radical refusal to answer slander, to not fight back, to day after day after day live amidst provocation. This may be our

walking out on the water. Picture Peter as he stood by the side of the boat, wind blowing his hair back and forth, rain driving into his forehead, his brethren muttering "You're absolutely *crazy,* there's no need for this…we're only going to have to save you ourselves". He must have felt so alone. There was no human encouragement. Probably his thoughts went back to the wife and kids he had left behind on the other side of the lake, in that humble home in that quaint fishing village. But his focus was upon one Man, the same Lord and Master whom we look out to from the sides of our ships. The sheer bravery of Peter's walking on water stands out. Was he afraid to walk on water? Of course he was. But he focused all his faith into the word of Jesus: "Come!". He overcame his fear to the point that he climbed over the sides of the boat. Picture him there, with one leg over the side and on the water, and the other still in the boat. He couldn't stay like that. He had to go only forward. The only thing that kept him back was fear. And it is basically *fear* which holds us within our comfort zones. Fear, fear, fear…that's all it is. To know 'truth' in its experiential sense should free us from fear; for fear is related to the unknown. God appeals to Israel: "Of whom has thou been afraid or feared, that thou hast lied?" (Is. 57:11). Fear leads to our abdicating from the responsibility of making choices; and this is why humanity has such a dearth of truly creative imagination, and why genuinely new ideas are so rare. But the true life in Christ is a life of repeatedly overcoming that fear, the fear which paralyzes, which holds you back. Let the widow woman of 1 Kings 17:13 be our heroine; she had totally nothing, just some flour; and she was hunting around in a parched land for two sticks with which to make a fire to bake it and eat her last meal, then to lie down in the dust of death. She must have been literally on her last legs. But then god through Elijah asked her to give Him even what terribly little she had. And Elijah encourages the frightened, wide-eyed woman: "Fear not!". And she went forward in faith and gave him her very last hope of life. Living at such an animal level would have made her very self-centred; but she stepped out of it in response to the Lord's challenge. Fear is, to my mind, the greatest single barrier to faith and true spirituality. It is fear alone which stops us from keeping commitments, from not entering into covenant relationship as deeply as we are bidden. This is why people shy away from covenant relationships, be they with the Father through baptism, or to another person through marriage or having children. Fear holds us back. We fear even ourselves, our own spiritual capacity, our standing before the Father. Our inner anxieties, our unconscious inner conflicts as we stand with Peter on the edge of the boat, contemplating what walking on water concretely meant, often lead us to criticize others or to speak and act with a hypocritical bravado. Yet true faith asks us to risk. As a psychotherapist friend of mine once jotted to me: "We are asked to risk all we believe ourselves to be, we may find we're not what we thought ourselves to be, our constructs of the self will be pushed to the limit and we're afraid of what we may find of ourselves, that we may not be what we imagine ourselves to be in the construct upon which we

have built our theories of the self. Obeying rules, staying within the construct, is much easier, much safer. We may have never tested ourselves in the real world. To launch off into the unknown, into a future that contains or may contain unknown risk, where our worst fears are realised, the greatest fear may be that we are failures... most of us, it would seem, don't have enough faith in there even being a God to risk even getting out of the boat let alone walking on the water". Don't underestimate the power of fear when it comes to walking on water. Nor let us fail to appreciate that the fearful are listed alongside the unrepentant whores and idolaters who shall remain outside the city of God (Rev. 21:8). Our thirst for love, our fear of death and spiritual failure before a perfect God, the fear of displeasing or misunderstanding the infinite God…these fears should all be taken away for the man or woman who is truly clothed with the imputed righteousness of Christ. Yet they have a way of persisting in our weakness of faith. And so there develops a conflict between our true conscience and the false suggestions of our faithless fears. All this can lead to neurotic behaviour and a repression of conscience. The only way out of this is to boldly step forward as Peter did, albeit bricking ourselves as we do so.

14:29 *And he said, Come*- The Lord's appeal to all men to 'come to Him' invites us to see ourselves as Peter, the prototype for all who would 'come unto Jesus'. Peter was asking to do as the Lord was doing- walking on water. Our coming to the Lord is therefore not merely an intellectual assent to a set of theology, however good that theology may be. The Lord defines coming to Him in practice as coming to the sick and imprisoned and thereby coming unto Him (Mt. 25:36).

And Peter got out of the boat- The idea of "go out" is 'to descend'. The boat was not that much above the water, but the point is being made that Peter 'came down' from it. The same word is used about how the disciples 'came down' to the sea as they boarded the boat (Jn. 6:16). And Peter is to descend yet lower when he sinks into the water. The impression is that the whole incident was intended to bring Peter down- and from thence to be raised up by the Lord's grace. The Lord's following discourse about Himself as the bread of life has many verbal connections with the incident on the lake which preceded it, as well as the feeding of the 5000 which had preceded that. Thus He emphasizes in the discourse the need to 'come' to Him, just as Peter had done. He also uses this same word for 'come down' to speak of how He too 'came down' as the bread of God (Jn. 6:33,38,41,42,50,51,58). It cannot be coincidental that this word has been used of the disciples 'coming down' into the boat (Jn. 6:16) and of Peter 'coming down' from the boat into the water (Mt. 14:29). Surely the message is that in Peter's 'coming down', and indeed in the necessary 'coming down' in humiliation of all disciples- the Lord is with us and has passed through the same. The idea of 'coming down' suggests both humility, and also, in the context, manifesting God, being sent from God.

But this very process means it is done in humility. The Lord developed the same theme with Peter when he later sees the sheet of unclean animals 'coming down' to him, and then he is commanded to 'come down' to the Gentiles waiting for him below (Acts 10:11,20,21).

And walked upon the water to go to Jesus- The very words in Mk. 6:48 used about the Lord Jesus walking on the water to go to the disciples. Peter wanted to replicate exactly what his Lord was doing; and he knew that if it really was his Lord, then this was possible. As He is the light of the world, so are we. If we in Him, we too are Abraham's singular seed; all that is true of Him becomes true of us. And if He can walk on water, then given the appropriate motive, time and context, we too can do so.

At Peter's initial conversion, he had also been in his ship on the sea of Galilee, and had seen Jesus walking [s.w.] near the sea shore (Mt. 4:18). He left his boat, and responded to the call to follow Jesus. Now it's the same basic scene, but this time Jesus is walking not "by" the sea but "on" the sea. The similarity is perhaps to teach Peter that the Lord's real call may be repeated throughout our lives; the initial response may be relatively painless, but through the storms of life, the Lord teaches us as He did Peter how radical is the response required. To follow Him meant not merely walking away from the cares of this life, the boat, the nets, the fishing…but if Jesus walks on water, then those who follow Him must do likewise. And Peter, to his immense credit, perceived this; he saw his Lord walking on water as an imperative that demanded he do likewise. For him, Jesus wasn't just a Saviour on whose back he could ride to salvation in God's Kingdom. Yes, He is of course our saviour wherein we sink and drown in our weaknesses. But He is more than that; He is an inspiring example. His offer to walk on water wasn't motivated, therefore, by any form of inquisitiveness or daredeviling; the offer to walk on the water was rooted in his grasp that if this is where the Lord walks, then axiomatically, we must do likewise. When the Lord walked "by" the sea, Peter had come out of the boat and followed Him; now the Lord walks "on" the sea, Peter perceives that he must follow Him even there. For "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6- the same word is used as in the record of Peter's walking on water with Jesus, making it possible that John is upholding Peter's example for us all). For many, our conversions were relatively painless; indeed, for those raised in the faith, it may have been easier to get baptized than to walk away from it. But the essentially radical invitation to follow Jesus is repeated in later life; and the validity of our earlier choice to follow is put to the test by our later response to the same invitation.

14:30 *But when he saw*- His focus wandered from Jesus, for one can only 'see' the wind by seeing what it blows. Perhaps his focus moved from the face of Jesus to His clothes, or maybe he even looked back to the sails of

the ship being blown, or down to the waves beneath him. Our focus on the Lord's face likewise so easily wanders.

The wind was strong- The Greek can strictly mean 'stronger, mightier', with the sense of comparison to something else- as in "one *mightier* than I" (Mt. 3:11), "a *stronger* than he comes" (Lk. 11:22). The wind seemed stronger to Peter- than what? Presumably- stronger than the power of Jesus. Maybe Paul had this in mind when he used the word in 1 Cor. 1:25; 10:22: "The weakness of God is *stronger* than men... [men] are not *stronger* than Him". Even though the Lord was Himself standing at ease upon those waves. Peter later uses a related word to speak of the strength or might which God gives in order to fulfil our ministry (1 Pet. 4:11). He had learnt the lesson- that nothing equals God's power, nothing is really stronger than Him. And yet any lack of faith in Him is effectively saying that there are winds or crises stronger than Him.

He was afraid- The record presents this as direct disobedience to the Lord's command "Be *not* afraid" (14:27). The Gospel records are transcripts of the preaching of the apostles, and they seem to love to emphasize their own weakness, especially that of Peter, their early leader, the rock upon whom the church was initially built. Such recognition of weakness should likewise stud our own presentations of the Gospel.

And beginning to sink- The same word is only used elsewhere in Mt. 18:6 where we read that those who turn away the little ones, as Peter and the other disciples had wished to do by wanting to send the crowd away, will be condemned by being cast into the sea where they will drown (s.w. "sink"). It wasn't that the Lord was punishing Peter for his attitude, but rather helping him realize that this was what condemnation would feel like for turning little ones away. We noted on 14:28 *come unto you* that the Lord's subsequent discourse when they reached land pointed out that their turning away of the crowd was the very opposite of His refusal to turn away any who come to Him. We must pause and reflect whether in any way we are turning the little ones away; or whether we are lending support to any church policy which results in that. Peter's experience of what condemnation would feel like surely empowered him never to do this in any way. Especially through supporting exclusions of the little ones from the Lord's table we run the risk of making the same mistake- with eternal consequences. We really must think through the implications of our positions, whatever it costs us in this brief life.

When Peter was sinking, he was living out the picture we have of condemnation at the last day. When we read that he began to “sink” into the sea of Galilee, this is exactly the image we find in Mt. 18:6, where the Lord says, in response to the question ‘Who will be the greatest?’, that he who offends one of the little ones will be drowned [s.w. “sink”] in the midst of the sea, His audience would have immediately associated this

with the midst of the sea of Galilee, just where the storm had occurred. Peter seems to have realized that this warning was pertinent to him, for it is he who then interrupts the Lord to ask how often he should forgive his brother (Mt. 18:21). Peter sinking into Galilee, giving up swimming but desperately throwing up his hand to the Lord [you don't swim with a hand outstretched], is the position of each person who truly comes to Christ. This is the extent of our desperation; baptism, conversion to Him, is most definitely not a painless living out of parental expectations. Note how they were "tossed" or 'tormented' (Gk.) by the raging waves (Mt. 14:24)- the very same word is used about how the rejected will be "tormented" in condemnation (Rev. 14:10; 20:10). Peter's salvation by the hand of the Lord was representative of us all. As he drowned there in the lake, he was effectively living out the condemnation of the last day. But he appealed urgently to the Lord: "Save me!". Later, Peter was to use the same words in his preaching, when he appealed to his nation to "save [themselves]" by calling on the name of the Lord, just as he had done on the lake (Acts 2:40). He saw that those people were in just the position which he had been in on the lake.

He cried out, saying- The use of the two words highlights the significance of his words.

Lord, save me!- Even in a moment of crisis, Peter's mind was in God's word; for here he is quoting from the urgent cry of the drowning man which is recorded in Ps. 69:1,2,14,15. This is where our subconscious absorption of God's word is so valuable. In the split second of crisis, the word comes to mind. The words are significant because they are the words used by Peter in urging others to call upon the same Lord to be saved. He was such a compelling preacher- persuading 3000 people to be baptized instantly- exactly because he had called out these very words himself. It is only by knowing our own desperation that we will be compelling preachers. No amount of artistry, presentation or wordsmithing can produce anywhere near the same effect. He encouraged the crowds to likewise call upon the name of the Lord and be saved (Acts 2:39). He saw himself then and there, in all his weakness and yet sincere desperation, as the epitome of us all. But the parallels don't stop there. Peter had asked the Lord bid him 'Come unto me' (Mt. 14:28). Yet this is the very language of the Lord to all: 'Come unto me...'. Yet Peter went further; in the same way as the Lord stretched forth His hand and saved Peter, so He stretches forth His hand, Peter observed, to save all who would come to Him (Mt. 14:31 = Acts 4:30). But Peter is framed as Jesus, in that he too stretched out his hand to save others as Jesus had done to him (Mt. 14:35 = Acts 5:15,16; Mt. 14:31 = Acts 3:7), bidding them come through the water of baptism as Jesus had done to him. As Jesus was worshipped after saving Peter, so men tried to worship Peter (Mt. 14:33 = Acts 3:11). So Peter went through what we all do- having been saved by Jesus, having come to Him and having been rescued by

the outstretched arm, he responds to this by doing the same for others. When the Lord "caught" hold of Peter as he sunk in the waves (Mt. 14:31), a Greek word is used which occurs only once elsewhere: "He did not take hold [s.w. to catch] of Angels, but of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). The Hebrew writer was surely alluding to the Lord's 'catching' of desperate Peter and pulling him to salvation- and saw in Peter a symbol of all those who will be saved by Christ.

Note that Peter cried out "*Lord*, save me!" when most men in that situation would have simply cried out "Save me!". But his grasp of the Lordship of the One he followed inspired faith. If He was truly Lord, He was capable of all things. "Lord, save me!" was a call uttered in a moment of weakness. His "sinking" (Mt. 14:30) is described with the same word used about condemnation at the last day (Mt. 18:6), and yet Peter in his preaching persuades condemned men to do just the same: to *call* on the *Lord* in order to be *saved* (Acts 2:21,40,47; 4:12; 11:14). He invited all men to enter into the weakness and desperation which he had known on the water of Galilee, and receive a like unmerited salvation. And when he tells his sheep that the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:18) he surely writes with memories of that same gracious deliverance. And in discussing ecclesial problems he points out that all of us have had a similar salvation, and should act with an appropriate inclusiveness of our brethren (Acts 15:11).

14:31 *And immediately Jesus stretched out his hand*- Peter again reflects his experience of personal salvation in his witness to others- for he likewise stretched out his hand to the lame man, and again with "immediate" effect, as here on the lake that night (Acts 3:7 s.w.). Peter felt that all the work he did by his own hand was effectively the Lord "stretching forth His hand to heal" (Acts 4:30). He realized that *his* hand was now the hand of Jesus, the same hand which had stretched forth [s.w. Acts 4:30] to save *him* on the lake that night. Our experience of salvation simply has to be re-enacted by us towards others. There is great emphasis in the Gospels upon the hands of Jesus- so often stretched out to heal, save and bless; the hands out of which no sheep can be taken, the hands into which all power has been given by the Father, the hands which were nailed through by men in their ignorance and rejection of God's salvation. And those hands are our hands. Think through this again- the Lord "stretched forth his hand" to save Peter (Mt. 14:31); and this is the very phrase used by Peter in Acts 4:30, speaking of how the Lord's hand is "stretched forth to heal". Peter saw himself on the lake as typical of all whom the Lord saves. Yet, it was *Peter*, not the Lord Himself, who stretched forth his hand to do the Lord's healing work on the lame man (Acts 3:7). Again, Peter is thinking back to the incident on the lake and perceiving that he is now Christ manifest as he had intended to be then. Thus it was the principle of God manifestation which inspired Peter to

reach out of his comfort zone so dramatically; and properly appreciated, it can motivate us likewise.

And took hold of him and said to him- The writer to the Hebrews twice uses the same Greek word. First, in describing how the Lord Jesus 'caught hold' of all the seed of Abraham in His saving work (Heb. 2:16), and again in speaking of how God "took" [s.w. "caught"] Israel "by the hand" and redeemed them from Egypt (Heb. 8:9). Peter is thus presented as everyman in Christ. He was saved out of condemnation, drowning in the waters for turning away the little ones. There is surely in each of us, looking back upon our lives, the sense that we were in His grip, and still are; He took hold of us, to save us. And there is a mutuality in this- for we too desperately catch hold of the hope of the Kingdom (s.w. 1 Tim. 6:12,19).

O you of little faith- A word used five times by the Lord, four of them recorded in Matthew (Mt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31;16:8). It's as if Matthew loved to emphasize in his preaching how weak their faith had been.

Why- The *eis tis* construction means far more than "why?". The simple sense of "why?" could have been expressed in one word. This little phrase is elsewhere translated "to what purpose?" (Mt. 26:8; Acts 19:3). The idea would then be: 'You know you need saving. To what purpose is doubt? Will doubt save you? No. So, seeing that lack of faith will not save you, and you need saving, then totally believe in My ability to save you'.

Did you doubt?- A form of the Greek for 'twice' or 'double'. James surely has the incident in mind when he warns not to be a double minded man, wavering in faith "like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6,8). He is holding up Peter- leader of the early church to whom he was writing- as the example of how *not* to be. This is no evidence of any tension between James and Peter; rather is it typical of what Peter himself does, in drawing attention to past weakness and development from that weakness as the sign of real spiritual strength and the basis for legitimate respect. James is clearly telling his readers not to be like Peter. It is easy for our reaction against Catholic extremism to lead us to under-estimate the high status of Peter in the early church. Here was James, also a respected elder, telling the flock to take a snapshot of their great leader Peter in his moment of weakness on the lake- and not be like him! Leaders of worldly organizations have a way of telling the flock that all their fellow leaders are as spotless as they are. But this wasn't the case in the early church. It was Peter's very humanity which was and is his inspiration.

14:32 *And when they boarded the boat*- Jesus and Peter. The "they" is contrasted with the "they" who were still in the ship (:33). The word picture is of Jesus and Peter united very closely.

The wind ceased- Gk. 'grew weary', as if there was a brief period over which the raging decreased.

John speaks in his Gospel of those who received Christ (Jn. 1:12,16; 3:32 etc.)- and it is in allusion to this that he speaks of how the disciples 'received Christ' into their ship whilst about to drown on Galilee (Jn. 6:21). Their desperation as they faced death was understood by John as a symbol of the desperation of all those who truly receive Christ. But without perceiving our desperation, can we properly 'receive' Him?

14:33 *And they that were in the boat*- They are not simply called 'the disciples', perhaps because as Matthew retold the Gospel, he felt that at that time they were not worthy of the name. The desire to send away the crowd hungry was such a major failure. And it makes sense that in the process of retelling the Gospel to audiences (of which the Gospel records are transcripts), Matthew would emphasize this- that the Lord turned nobody away, and neither would the apostles who were now retelling the story- because they had learnt how wrong that would be.

Worshipped Him, saying- Let's not miss the significance of the fact they 'came' to Him. The same word has been used of Peter 'coming' to the Lord on the water (:28,29), of the crowd 'coming' to Jesus immediately prior to their departure in the boat (Jn. 6:5), and the Lord will go on straight away to teach the need to 'come' to Him (Jn. 6:35,37,44,45,65). Peter's example inspired them all. They too realized that the crowd had not been wrong to 'come to Jesus', and that they had been wrong to want to send them away (Mt. 14:15); for they had been saved exactly because Jesus does not send away any who come to Him (Jn. 6:37). Those who were in the ship came and worshipped Him after He came into the ship- suggesting that they kept themselves at some distance from Him and Peter, marvelling at Him, realizing their unworthiness, and therefore cowering around the sides of the boat.

Of a truth you are the Son of God- The implication is that they had doubted it previously. The miracle of feeding 5000 people surely had elicited faith in them that He was God's Son. But when He appeared silent to their needs when about to die on the lake, they started to lose that faith- just as we can, when the Lord doesn't act as we think He should or when He appears completely silent. The title they use is "Son of God" when they could just as easily have called Him 'Messiah' or some other equivalent term. Because He acted as God, whose voice is greater than stormy winds (Ps. 148:8) and who walks upon the waves of the sea- they therefore concluded and intuitively felt that He must be God's Son. And yet when Trinitarians perceive that Jesus did things which the Father is spoken of as exclusively doing, they conclude that 'Jesus is God'. But that

was never the conclusion of the disciples- their conclusion and immediate, intuitive feeling was that therefore this Son of man must be also Son of God. And that is indeed the Biblical position. The only other person who cried out "Truly [this was] the Son of God" was the Centurion at the cross (Mt. 27:54- the same three Greek words are used). Our experience of the cross likewise leads us to the same position as the disciples upon the lake. And it seems likely that this exclamation that 'I truly believe Jesus is God's Son' was one of the declarations made by baptismal candidates in the early church (as it was in Acts 8:37). In this case, Matthew and the apostles would have been holding up their own conversion experiences as a pattern for other believers, just as Paul saw his conversion as a pattern for all who would later believe (1 Tim. 1:16).

"You are the Son of God" was the emotional confession of a moment, because Mk. 6:52 says that their hearts were hard and they didn't "understand". In this we see the fickleness of what can appear to be faith; we can with sincerity say one thing, when actually our hearts very soon go to a position of unbelief or at least, far lower faith than in the heat of the glorious moments when faith is rewarded. The Gospel writers use their records to bring out their own fickleness. After having been awed to this confession by the Lord's stilling of the storm, they are soon almost mocking Him for asking who had touched Him, when hundreds of the jostling crowd had touched Him (Lk. 8:25 cp. 45).

After recording the feeding of the 5000, Luke records that the Lord asked the disciples again about who He was, and Peter replied that He was the "Christ of God". The Lord was seeking to develop and consolidate their confession of faith. Thus in Lk. 9:18, the Lord Jesus asks His men: "Whom say the people that I am?". Why did He ask this? Surely, with His sensitivity and insight into people and society, He knew full well the various theories that first Century Palestine entertained about Him. It seems to me that He asked this question for the disciples' sake; He wanted them to reflect upon the wide range of wrong theories which there were concerning His identification. And this led on to His next question: "But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said, The Christ of God". Surely the Lord Jesus knew what they thought of Him, without needing to ask them. Philip and Nathanael had earlier revealed that they considered Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and "the Son of God" (Jn. 1:45,49). So, why did the Lord ask this question? Again, it was surely to focus His disciples upon the reality of the fact that despite all the various wrong theories, they actually knew the truth about Him. But the Lord then goes on to His essential point: "Tell no man that thing; saying, The Son of man must suffer many things…and be slain, and be raised…If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me… For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Lk. 9:21-25). The Lord told the disciples to "Tell no man" by saying that "The Son of man must suffer…". I submit

that "Tell no man…" is almost hyperbole; surely He means 'For now, focus more on the fact of my forthcoming death and your response to it, than telling others. If you gain the whole world for me in your preaching but lose your own salvation, what are you advantaged?'. After His resurrection they were to tell others; as the great commission made plain. And there is a powerful message to us all here, especially to those who concern themselves with large amounts of preaching. We should not be so caught up in listing the errors of others that we fail to appreciate the huge personal import of the truth that we do surely know. Indeed, the Lord sought to focus His men upon the Truth they knew by asking them firstly to consider all the wrong theories about Him. He then went on to bring home to them the radical, transforming impact of that Truth if it is properly believed and acted upon. Luke seems to draw attention to this theme again in Lk. 10:20, where the disciples return from a successful preaching mission to be told to focus their elation instead upon the reality of their own personal salvation: "Rejoice not [i.e. not so much] that the spirits are subject unto you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven". We are not to turn a blind eye to others' misunderstandings; the tragedy of the errors of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism etc. should not pass us by. But neither are we to remain obsessed with them. We are to be led by such reflection to rejoice in the basic truth of Jesus which we have been blessed with.

14:34 *And when they had crossed over, they came*- Perhaps the emphasis is upon *they*. The Lord and His disciples were now united again.

To land at Gennesaret- This is on the northwest shore of Galilee. Mk. 6:45 says that they departed on their journey aiming for Bethsaida, on the northeast shore. The Lord had upbraided Bethsaida in Mt. 11:21. Perhaps the disciples had insisted on pressing ahead with giving those people another chance, whereas that was not the Lord's will. Such providential overruling of our preaching is a common occurrence. One wonders whether the changed journey plan involved not returning to the Jews but going to a more Gentile area. This would have been in line with the Lord's own change of course in His ministry, turning away from the Jewish masses towards the tiny minority who accepted Him and towards the Gentiles (see on 13:10).

14:35 *And when the men of that place recognised him*- This would suggest that they didn't know His face. Their faith was therefore based around the word about Christ which they had heard. Matthew may well have this in mind as an example to the audiences he is preaching too, who were likewise hearing about Christ and being asked to show practical faith in Him, even though they had not seen Him. We in our generation are of course in the same situation.

They sent word to all in that region and brought to him all who were sick- These "men" were not disciples. But they 'sent out'- Gk. *apostello*. Although they were not the apostles, they acted as apostles, purely on the basis of what they had heard about Jesus, as they had not personally seen Him before. And they sent out the message to "all", inviting people to come to Jesus and 'leading' them to Him (AV "brought them to Jesus"). This is all very much the language and concepts of the great commission. That commission was to be obeyed by those who had not personally met the Lord, whose faith was based upon the word of others; and they were to do the work of apostles, going to "all" and urging people to come to Jesus. These "men" of Gennesaret are being set up as a model of obedience to the great commission, and are therefore a particular role model for our generation. Mark seems to put the emphasis at this point on the Lord going out into all the region. Mk. 6:56 speaks of His preaching campaign as focusing on the towns, villages and "country" - in modern terms, the villages, hamlets and isolated rural dwellings. He made the effort to get out to the individuals, the poorest and loneliest of society. So the Lord went out to people in those hamlets (Mk.), and yet people from those hamlets came to Him (Mt.). This is how the Lord operates to this day. God is in search of man, and yet man is in search of God- hence the cosmic joy in the 'touch' of meeting.

"Sick", Gk. *kakos* can mean a very wide range of illness, including spiritually.

14:36 *And they pleaded with him that they might only touch*- The Greek *parakleo* means literally 'to call near' and in this case we can understand it literally. They felt that they had to touch Him in order to be healed (unlike the cases of faith in His spoken word which the Lord so commends). Therefore, needing that physical presence, it makes sense to understand *parakleo* here as meaning to literally call near. They called Him near so that they might touch the hem of His garment.

The fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well- The Law of Moses commanded the Jews to make "borders" of blue upon their clothes (Num. 15:38), presumably to remind them of Heaven in daily life. But the same Hebrew word is found in Mal. 4:2, speaking of how the Messianic "sun of righteousness" was to arise with "healing in His hems". Their seeking for healing in the hem of the Lord's clothes was therefore a sign that they accepted Him as Messiah. But the 'arising' of Malachi 4 is the time of the Kingdom established on earth, with Judah freed from her oppressors. The time for Mal. 4:2 was not then. They thought it was. And yet the Lord still goes along with their misunderstanding, by granting them healing from His hems. This may have been simply from compassion of the moment towards human need; or it could be that the Lord was happy to reward faith when He saw it,

even if it was based upon somewhat wrong interpretation of the Father's word.

CHAPTER 15

15:1 *Then there came to Jesus Pharisees and scribes*- Matthew records many people 'coming to Jesus'. A related word is found in Jn. 6:37: "All that the Father gives me shall come to Me; and he who *comes* to Me, I will in no way reject". Many 'came to Jesus' but only some really came. Again we see a warning against surface level Christianity- coming to Him externally, but not in essence.

From Jerusalem, saying- They came all the way to Galilee to try to trap the Lord in His words. And yet it was some of the Jerusalem priests (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees (Acts 15:5) who later accepted Christ. We would likely have ignored these troublemakers and given up on them as hard cases, to be endured but not converted. But the Lord's hope and vision for humanity was so wide- and in the end, even after His death, it paid off. This is a great challenge to us in our witness to all men, including the bitter, self-righteous religious leader types.

15:2 *Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?*- The word *presbeteros* would've been understood by all to refer to members of the Sanhedrin. And yet the later New Testament uses the word about elders within the Christian church, who got to that status regardless of social position but purely on the basis of spiritual qualification; thus a spiritually qualified slave or young believer in their 20s could be a *presbeteros* in the new Israel which was being consciously created by the Lord in parody of the old Israel.

Often Paul sees similarities between the Pharisees' behaviour as recorded in the Gospels, and that of people he brushed against in his life (e.g. Mt. 15:2 = Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8; Mt. 15:9 = Col. 2:22; Tit. 1:14; Mt. 16:6 = 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Gal. 5:9; Mt. 23:31,32 = 1 Thess. 2:15). We too are to translate the Gospels into our own life situations.

For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread- Rabbi Joses claimed that "to eat with unwashen hands is as great a sin as adultery." And Rabbi Akiba in captivity used his water ration to wash his hands rather than to drink, resulting in him almost dying of dehydration.

15:3 *And he answered and said to them: Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?*- Although the Lord was very hard in some ways upon the twelve, accusing them of "no faith" etc., whenever He spoke about them to others or to His Father, He was so positive and defensive about them. This is a valuable window onto His current mediation for us. The disciples were ordinary Jews who weren't

such righteous men; they didn't wash before a meal, and the Pharisees criticized them. The Lord explained why this wasn't so important; but the disciples still didn't understand (:15,16). And yet He justifies them to the Pharisees as if they *did* understand, and as if their non-observance of ritual washing was because of their great spiritual perception. Surely the Lord imputed a righteousness to them which was not their own. He had asked the disciples to be obedient to every jot and tittle of the teaching of the Scribes, because they "sit in Moses' seat". And yet when they are criticized for not doing what He'd asked them to do, for not washing hands before a meal, the Lord Jesus vigorously defends them by criticizing their critics as hypocrites (Mk. 7:2-8). Indeed, the Lord's passion and anger with the critics comes out very clearly in the subsequent record of the incident; and it is the essence of that passion which He has for us in mediating for us.

The force of "also" transgress is that the Lord didn't deny that His men were transgressing the tradition of the elders- even though He had elsewhere taught them to obey those who "sit in Moses' seat" (Mt. 23:2). But still He justifies His disciples to the world, reflecting His love and imputation of righteousness towards them. And this Lord is our Lord.

The tension is between human *tradition*, and Divine *commandment*. There is a tendency to assume that tradition passed down over a period of time is in fact from God. Even the most protestant of Protestant churches have this tendency. And it is in all of us. The Lord goes on to demonstrate that God's *command* is transgressed not only by bold faced disobedience, but equally by seeking to get around its real force and by *omitting* to do what that command implies. Accepting the real implication of God's inspired word means that we will fearlessly break with tradition when necessary, and will examine whether our response to His word is direct obedience or rather a mirage, 'getting around' the direct requirement. All this is the practical outcome of believing the Bible to be inspired.

The tradition in view is not specifically their teaching about washing. The subsequent context shows the Lord has in view other traditions. His argument is therefore 'If *some* of your traditions are wrong and unBiblical, then why demand we keep other traditions which are within that same body of tradition'. And so He relentlessly requires that tradition within any religious group is fearlessly analysed- if some are unBiblical, then the others need not be respected. Just as "tradition" and "commandment" are placed in apposition to each other, likewise "your" is in opposition to "of God". Elevating tradition to the status of Divine commandment is yet another way in which religious people 'play God'.

15:4 *For God said*- AV "Commanded". His word speaks directly to us, whereas the Greek word for "tradition" means something passed down.

To make the point, the Lord speaks of the commandments of Moses as *God* commanding. The Jews spoke of *Moses* commanding (Jn. 8:5), and although the Lord also does (Mt. 8:4), His point is that it was effectively *God* commanding.

Saying- AV. This apparently redundant word severs to emphasize that God's word is a living word, speaking directly to us, and not mediated to us through passed down traditions of men.

Honour your father and your mother, and he that speaks evil of father or mother- The Lord Jesus saw as parallel the commands to honour parents and also not to curse them. These two separate commands (from Ex. 20:12 and 21:17) He spoke of as only one: "*the* commandment" (Mk. 7:9). He therefore saw that not to honour parents was effectively to curse them (Mk. 7:10). *Omitting* to honour parents, even if it involved appearing to give one's labour to God's temple, was therefore the same as *committing* the sin of cursing them. He therefore speaks in :6 of how they did *not* honour their parents by the legal loophole they had devised- but this is the same as cursing them. The Lord looked very deeply at the implication of human behaviour and positions; and He does the same with ours too. The fact He has such penetrating depth of analysis highlights His patient grace with us- for He realizes the nature of human sin far more perceptively than we do, who see only a few implications of each sin.

Must surely die- In Mark's account, the Lord taught that to wangle one's way out of caring for their parents by delegating it to the synagogue was effectively cursing them, and those guilty must "die the death" (Mk. 7:10,11). To him who knows to do good but does it not, this omission is counted as sin (James 4:17- written in the context of brethren omitting to help each other).

15:5 *But you say*- The saying of God (note the word "saying" in :4) was overridden by the saying of men. This quotation was from the passed down traditions of the Jews. But the Lord says that *you* say this. The 'saying' of the Rabbis became the 'saying' of those who obeyed them. Thus obedience to a command (in this case, of men) is counted as 'saying' it- for we pass on teaching by our example of doing it. The depth of the Lord's analysis of their behaviour is amazing.

Whoever shall say to his father or his mother- To give a word, or written contract.

That with which you might have been profited by me is given to God- If a

gift was made to the temple treasury of what was reckoned to be the obligation of the man to his parents, or if the man agreed to list the temple treasury as a beneficiary in his will, giving to them the amount he would have spent caring for his elderly parents- then he was considered free from having to honour and care for them. The reasoning was that something promised to God in the future was His and could not therefore be spent on parents. But this was *not* honouring the parents (:6). We can't buy our way out of spiritual responsibility by making donations or making legacies which cost us nothing today. We can think that we are devoting ourselves to the Lord's cause over and above that which is required of us- when actually, we do nothing of the sort. We can give to the Lord's cause, when actually we have only got round the essential intention of God's commandments to be generous-spirited and show a true love (Mt. 15:5,6). The Jews fasted on days which the Law did not require of them; but in God's ultimate analysis, they did this for themselves, to bolster their own spiritual ego, rather than as a fast which He recognized (Zech. 7:15,16). The more active we are in the community of believers, the more we feel we go the extra miles- the more sober is this warning.

The very language of "profit" is inappropriate. If we have a duty to help someone, then that help is hardly their "profit". The very term reduces love and the care that comes from love to a mere transaction.

15:6 *He shall not honour his father*- To not honour ones' parents is, in the Lord's book, to actively curse them, even though it is doubtful those He was criticizing ever actually did so (Mt. 15:1-6). This is the power of sin of omission.

Thus you have made void the word of God because of your tradition- It could mean, literally, of no authority. Again the Lord is making the point that practical obedience to God's word is a function of what authority we give it. To disobey God's commands by seeking to 'get around' them is effectively saying that God's word is of no authority. And this is the context of this whole discussion- God's word is the sole authority, and not human tradition and the concessions to disobedience made by men. His word is sent forth and *will accomplish* its purpose, Isaiah says; and yet we can make "the word of God of none effect" by our traditions or our lack of preaching it. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men.
Or we can understand "effect" as just that- effect. The command to honour and practically care for elderly parents had an "effect". God's laws are not simple tests of obedience for the sake of it. The process of obedience has "effect"; disobedience therefore robs us of the positive effect which obedience will bring. Caring for elderly parents, putting "honour" into practice rather than leaving it as mere words, is designed to

teach us something. Here in Matthew we read of the "commandment" (*entole*) of God, but in Mk. 7:13 of the "word" (*logos*) of God. What did the Lord say? Perhaps: 'You make the commandment, that is, the intention (*logos*) of God, of no effect". God's word of command is a *logos*, an intention. See on :9 *in vain*.

It's also quite legitimate to understand *akuroo* as meaning to disannul (s.w. Gal. 3:17). In this case, the Lord is saying that the Jews were doing the unthinkable for them- disannulling God's law. The law was disannulled by the death of the Lord Jesus, and Judaism and the early communities of Jewish converts clearly struggled with that idea. But Matthew records the Lord's words at this point to demonstrate that effectively, the Law had been disannulled already by Jewish disobedience to it and following human traditions which left the Law without power and function.

Again, "tradition" is put here for 'the keeping of tradition'. Tradition means 'that which is passed on', and it is only that if it is actually practiced.

15:7 *You hypocrites*- The Lord could use this term about people only because He could see what was on the inside (the heart, :8). We who cannot do this are perhaps not able to define others in this way.

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying- The reference to "this people…" was not to be understood as only Isaiah's hearers, but all who read this living word (:8). And so this is in the end how to study the Bible- to let it speak to *you in your generation*.

15:8 *This people honours me with their lips but their heart is far from me*- The prophecy quoted from Is. 29 is a criticism of the common people of Judah at Hezekiah's time; there was Godly leadership, but Isaiah laments that the ordinary people were far from Yahweh. But the Lord quotes this as relevant to the Jewish religious leadership, who prided themselves on their separation from the mass 'people of the land' whom they considered as apostate. Yet again we see His radical turning upside down of the Jewish worldview and creation of a new order, where secular people like His disciples were to be the new Sanhedrin leadership (see on 15:2 *elders*). Note that He was at this stage specifically addressing the Jewish elders, because only in :10 does He call the crowd to Him to listen.

They honoured with their lips, but their heart was far from God; they externally kept His commandments, but they frustrated their intention by not letting them influence their essential selves (Mk. 7:6-9). They fiercely

guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name (Jer. 23:27). The Lord perceived that "your tradition… the commandments of men… your doctrines" resulted in the hearts of Israel being "far from [God]". Doctrine was intended to affect the heart; and false doctrine resulted in the heart being far from God. True doctrine, on the other hand, was and is intended to bring the heart close to God. Doctrine / teaching is therefore to affect the heart; it is not just the intellectual basis for unity in a community of believers. And the Lord goes on in this very context to talk of how "every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up" (Mt. 15:13). The Greek for "planted" is interpreted by James Strong as meaning "Figuratively, to instil doctrine". The planting of the believer is through the instillation of Godly doctrine, rather than the doctrines of men. Note how the Lord speaks of doctrine as a command in Mt. 15:6,9: "Thus have you made the *commandment* of God of none effect by your tradition... in vain they do worship Me, teaching for *doctrines* the commandments of men". And He taught earlier that the doctrine of one God was in fact a command to action. Doctrine, *didache*, is teaching, not just theory; it is commandment towards action. For doctrine and practice are linked. In this we are helped to assess whether any idea or interpretation is indeed a 'first principle doctrine' or not. What does it inspire in practice? Or is it merely the academic interpretation of the human brain cells?

15:9- see on 15:2.

But in vain do they worship me- Worship and sacrifice to God can be done "in vain" if our attitude to His word is wrong. The reason for the vanity of their worship and devotions was because their doctrine was wrong. This clearly shows that religious devotion alone doesn't mean anything in terms of acceptability with God. And it also shows that the intention of doctrine, of teaching from God's word, is so that our lives are *not* lived "in vain"; there is "effect" in the outworking of God's true word in human lives. "In vain" here is surely to be semantically paralleled with "no effect" in :6.

Teaching doctrines- The original of Is. 29:13,14 doesn't say this. It is addressed to *the people*, stating that their fear of God is taught by the doctrines of men. The Lord amends the text slightly to make it relevant to the *teachers* whom He was addressing. Such amending of Old Testament quotation was common in Jewish *midrash*. The point is, that God's ancient word is to be reapplied to us today in *our* contexts, rather than be left as mere historical statement to people long ago.

Which are the precepts of men- The emphasis was surely upon the word "men". The Lord has been comparing the commandments of *God* with Jewish tradition. Tradition had become the word of God to these people.

15:10 *And he called to himself the crowd*- His previous teaching in this chapter was therefore given to the "scribes and Pharisees" of :1 in a private audience. See on :8 *this people*.

And said to them: Hear and understand- The Lord was speaking specifically to the crowd, without the presence of the disciples, who only later came to Him (:12). The Greek words for "hear and understand" were repeatedly used by the Lord in Mt. 13:13,14,15,19. There He had explained to the disciples that the crowds did *not* and *could not* "hear and understand", and therefore He was confusing them by parables; only the disciples heard and understood. But here, hoping against hope, the Lord makes a desperate appeal to the crowds to hear and understand. Such is His hopefulness that He was unashamed to depart from a declared position about people, and hope that they might somehow respond. We are left to imagine the tone of desperate pleading in His voice as He appealed for them to "hear and understand" in the light of how He had used those words about the crowds in Mt. 13. In the same spirit, Paul turned to the Gentiles- and yet continued by all means trying to persuade the Jews.

15:11 *It is not what enters into the mouth which defiles the man*- The same words are found in the Lord's final message to us in Rev. 21:27- nothing will *go into* the Kingdom of God which *defiles*. Surely He had in mind the words He had spoken here 30 years previously. Nothing can go into and defile- but a *person* can. The Lord is showing that defilement is a personal matter, not a question of avoiding eating or touching 'unclean' things. The whole discussion here about defilement is in the context of the Pharisees criticizing the disciples for eating "with defiled, that is, unwashed, hands" (Mk. 7:2 s.w.). Paul had meditated upon the Lord's teaching here deeply, because he clearly alludes to it in saying that he is "persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean [s.w. 'defiled'] in itself" (Rom. 14:14). Again we see the nature of the living word- these black words on white paper, those shimmering images on our screens, become the Lord Jesus reasoning with us and persuading us over issues.

But what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man- Here we see the huge importance placed by the Lord upon our words. He goes on to explain that it is what comes out of the *heart* which defiles (:18,19), but words are an expression of the heart. Therefore by them we shall be judged (Mt. 12:37). What comes out of the heart is what comes out of the mouth (:18)- ultimately, at least, after we have finished all the hypocritical games of trying to say one thing whilst thinking otherwise. And Mark adds that what comes out of *the man*, what comes out "from *within*", is what defiles him (Mk. 7:15,23). A man is his heart and

so he is his words, just as "the word was [and is] God". We note that the same word is used about gracious words 'proceeding out of [the Lord's] mouth' (Lk. 4:22). They were a reflection of the grace deep within Him, which *is* Him. And likewise ungracious words are not to 'proceed' [s.w.] from *our* mouths, but only words that "may minister grace to the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

15:12- see on 17:10.

Then came the disciples, and said to him: Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?
- The Lord's teaching that nothing external can defile was undermining the very basis of their worldview. No wonder they were angry. Although it was the death of Christ which ended the Mosaic Law and cleansed things so that nothing should be called "defiled" (s.w.- Acts 10:15,28; 11:9), the Lord ahead of that time pronounced this to be the case. And in essence this was the case anyway- because in spiritual terms, the 'unclean' things could not defile a person. They were only declared unclean under the Law of Moses to teach people about the more important internal defilements they should avoid.

The Lord elsewhere taught of the immense danger and responsibility of making another stumble / be offended (18:6,8,9). But sometimes stumbling is inevitable- "in many things we offend all" (James 3:2). Responsibility for stumbling is therefore not only with the party who causes it. Some did stumble at the Lord's teaching (Mt. 11:6; 13:21,57); He was a rock of stumbling. But perhaps the disciples hoped the Pharisees would be converted, and considered that the Lord's teaching here was so radical that it was going to make them stumble from that path. According to this understanding, the Lord didn't make the Pharisees ultimately stumble. The disciples *feared* He would, thinking (wrongly) that a less demanding message might make the way easier for the Pharisees. And the Lord conceded to their concerns, whilst not agreeing with them- for in Mt. 17:27 He picks them up on this incident and tells that they should act in such a way that does not "offend" others.

15:13 *But he answered and said: Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant shall be rooted up*- It was commonly understood that all Israel were the planting of the Lord, having been planted as vines in His vineyard (Num. 24:6; 2 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 44:2; 80:8,15; Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21; 11:17; 45:4). Yet He implies here that the scribes and Pharisees were *not* planted by God. The Old Testament references to Israel having been planted by God are many- to say that Israel's religious leaders were *not* planted by God was to clearly say that He did not consider them to be the true Israel. But the restored Kingdom of God was to feature

planting of new vines (Is. 41:19; 51:16; Jer. 24:6; 31:28; 32:41; Ez. 36:36; Am. 9:15) just as He had planted a garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8), and so again the Lord is hinting that the old Israel was coming to an end, and a new Israel being planted which was in embryo the Kingdom of God, paradise restored. Paul picks up this figure in speaking of how his preaching of the Gospel was 'planting', specifically, a vineyard (1 Cor. 3:6-8; 9:7). This connects with the Old Testament and New Testament descriptions of Old Testament Israel as the vineyard God planted (Mt. 21:33; Lk. 13:6; 20:9). Paul saw that a new Israel was being formed one by one. Teaching God's word is described by Paul in 1 Cor. 3:6-8 as 'planting', and it would seem this was a Jewish metaphor used for the instilling of God's word into students. In this case, the Lord would be continuing the theme developed so far in Matthew 15- that attention to God's word is what makes someone part of the true Israel. Because of their rejection of the word of God in favour of the word of men, the Pharisees and scribes were therefore not planted by the Father. This was their choice.

Clearly the Scribes and Pharisees were plants, in the same field as the ones planted by the Father, who would be rooted up. They had been planted by someone other than the Father. This of course is exactly the picture presented by the parable of the wheat and weeds. But the Lord taught in that parable that the 'rooting up' must be left to the Angels at the last day. The subsequent command to the disciples to "let them alone" could be understood in the context of the wheat and weeds parable- the idea might be 'Don't *you* think you can sort them out. Leave them alone. Let God do it'. The Lord saw the problem that the disciples might root up wheat as well as weeds (He uses the same word- Mt. 13:29). And His concern was justified- for as noted on :1, there were within this general category of Scribes and Pharisees a number who would later repent and come to Christ. Those who are to be plucked up at the last day are in essence already plucked up by God, from His perspective (Jude 12 s.w.). The repentance of some of those Scribes and Pharisees (see on :1) who appeared in the 'to be plucked up' category is a great example and warning to us. If the disciples had rooted them up then, those individuals would not later have come to Christ. So one reason why we are not to 'root up' is because we have no idea how that person may change in later life; we do not see the specific potentials in people.

15:14 *Let them alone*- The Lord bothered with the scribes and Pharisees, and some were converted thanks to His efforts (see on :1). But He knew it was best for the disciples to keep away from these people. Yet He may have meant 'Don't *you* try to root them up'- see on :13.

They are blind guides- But some in this category repented (see on :1). That was how they were at that time. But even blind leaders can repent, Saul of Tarsus being the great example. They were heading for the "ditch" of condemnation, but some pulled back.

And if the blind are guided by the blind, both shall fall into a pit- The blind can lead the blind into the ditch, i.e. to be 'rooted up' in condemnation (Mt. 15:13,14 cp. 13:29). And yet *now* in this day of marvellous opportunity, we can lift both ourselves and others out of that pit of condemnation (Mt. 12:11). Some of those who are now 'rooted up', i.e. condemned as they would be in the future judgment (Mt. 13:28), who are "wandering" as the rejected will in the last day, can still be saved from this by us pulling them out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 12,22). Men can escape from the "damnation of hell" in which they are in (Mt. 23:33). Herein lies the urgency of our task in both personal repentance and pastoral work. But we note too the responsibility of leaders- they can lead others to condemnation. We do well to analyse our leaders. When the Lord elsewhere spoke of the blind leading the blind, He went on to tell the story of the partially sighted man who tries to remove what he perceives as a splinter of wood from his brother's eye (Lk. 6:39-42). The implication is that we are all blind, and need leadership- but by the Lord, not by each other. And He is saying the same thing here in Mt. 15. By telling the disciples not to be led by the Pharisees in order to avoid falling into condemnation, He is effectively implying that the disciples were blind- for if the blind lead the blind, then they will fall into the ditch of condemnation.

The pit is that of condemnation. And yet the Lord likens Himself to a man who lifts His sheep out of the ditch / pit (s.w. Mt. 12:11). We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was, and yet be saved out of it. Just as some of those blind Scribes and Pharisees were saved (see on :1).

15:15 *And Peter answered and said to him: Explain to us the parable*- The Lord replies by expanding upon what He has said in :11 about a man being defiled by what comes out of him, rather than by what he eats or touches. And yet the Lord's teaching in :11 was hardly parabolic. Perhaps it was too much for the disciples to believe that the Lord had declared void the entire conception of becoming unclean by what you eat; and they assumed He must be talking in parables. Peter in Acts 10 was still convinced that defiled food should not ever be eaten. But it could also be that the "parable" Peter wanted explained was what the Lord had just spoken about the blind leading the blind and falling into a ditch; Lk. 6:39 specifically calls this saying a "parable". In this case, the Lord didn't oblige, at least not specifically. He went on to expand on His previous teaching that we are defiled by our own thoughts and words, rather than

by what we eat. Perhaps the Lord meant that once that point was truly grasped, then it would be apparent that the Pharisees with their concept of ritual defilement by food were blind leaders- and should not be given the status of leaders.

15:16 *And he said: Are you still without understanding?*
- The emphasis may be on the "still"- He says the same in the next verse, "Do you *still not* understand?". The Lord asked the disciples; as if to say that He was surprised the disciples still hadn't come to the understanding which He hoped the Pharisees soon would. The crowds that followed the Lord didn't understand His parables; in fact, He spoke in parables so that they wouldn't understand, as He intended His teaching only to be grasped by the disciples (Mk. 7:17,18). Therefore, in that very context, it is significant to read of the Lord's frustration and disappointment when the disciples likewise didn't understand the parables. And the record goes on to show that in fact it was a regular occurrence, that they like the crowds didn't understand the parables, and the Lord had to explain to them later. So the disciples, contrary to the Lord's high hopes of them, were no better than the crowds. They too 'didn't get it'; and Mark's [i.e. Peter's] record of the Gospel therefore brings out the point that they too, the ones now preaching to the crowds, only got the understanding they did of the Lord by an undeserved grace. This is the kind of humility we need in our teaching of others, especially when it involves correcting their lack of understanding on a point.

15:17 *Do you not understand, that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the belly and is expelled?-* The world would not perceive / understand (Mk. 4:12); but they did, or so the Lord told them. And hence His distress that they did *not* perceive (Mk. 7:18; 8:17); and yet He said that blessed were their ears and minds, because they understood what had been hidden from so many. Surely He imputed more perception to them than they really had. The Lord was frustrated that by this point in His ministry, they still didn't understand that food couldn't really defile a person. And even by the time of Acts 10, Peter was still not persuaded of this. The Lord's hopefulness in them was such that He had great expectations of the speed of their spiritual growth, which resulted in disappointment for Him. This is all very much the enthusiasm of the lover for the beloved.

15:18 *But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart, and it is they that defile the man-* Mark adds: "This He said, thus making all foods clean" (Mk. 7:19). Paul really did meditate on every word of his Lord. Thus he says he was *persuaded* by the Lord Jesus that all foods were clean (Rom. 14:14)- this is how he took the Lord's teaching in Mk. 7:19. Those words *lived* to Paul, they were as the personal

persuasion of his Lord, as if Christ was talking to him personally through the Gospel records. Peter was taught the same lesson (Acts 10:14,15), as was Paul: "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Earlier, Paul had reasoned that to refuse certain foods was a sign of spiritual weakness (Rom. 14:2). Our attitude to food "does not commend us to God" (1 Cor. 8:8). Most incriminating of all is the warning that apostate Christians would teach men, "to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3).

15:19 *For out of the heart*- I have repeatedly used this verse to demonstrate that sin comes from within, and not from any cosmic being called 'Satan'. If indeed Satan is responsible for initiating human sin, then this would be the classic place for the Lord to teach it. Instead, He traces sinful words and actions to their true source, the heart. That, in the end, is the great 'satan', or adversary. "Out of the heart" parallels "out of the *mouth*" (:18)- the implication is surely that sin is committed through the route of heart - mouth - action. The Lord heavily condemns thought (heart) and words (mouth) because these are considered not sinful, or not very sinful, by human judgment. What one thinks internally is not a criminal act in any court of law, and what one says is only rarely so. External actions are all important in human judgment (remember the context is of washing at meal times)- the Lord is saying that thought and word are the essence which God looks at rather than the external action. What comes out of the mouth comes out of the heart- that is the clear teaching. And yet we fool ourselves into thinking that we can think one thing, and say something else with our mouth. The Lord's parallel would suggest that sooner or later, that breaks down, and words reflect thought.

The Pharisees were concerned about things entering a person and defiling them. The Lord perceptively noted that this implied that a person was basically clean, and just needed to avoid contamination by externalities. His teaching attacked that base assumption- He taught that the inward parts of a man were the source of defilement. This difference in perspective is reflected in differing approaches to the Gospel today. Some focus upon the need for social reform and improvement of the circumstances surrounding people, believing that the right external environment will lead to reformation of life. I favour the approach taken by the Lord- that the essence is of internal reformation, so that in whatever external environment we are living, the internal spirit is pure. The Lord reasons from the very structure of the human alimentary canal, that unclean food is naturally passed out of our system. But there is no such natural, inbuilt ability to deal with matters of the heart. The implication could be that we therefore need external intervention in the arena of the human heart in order to be cleansed and have strength

against defilement- and this is precisely the work of the Holy Spirit, bearing in mind that 'spirit' usually refers to the mind / heart. It may be that the Lord is not so much teaching the need to somehow control the fountain of potential defilement thrown up by the heart- as implying that we need a new, cleansed heart. This is what was promised as part of the new covenant (Ez. 18:31; 36:26), and those in Christ have entered that new covenant and received the promised gift of the Spirit to transform the human heart, the "inner man" (Eph. 3:16).

Come evil thoughts- Mark's parallel record uses the same Greek word for "thoughts", but different ones for "proceed" and "evil", although the meaning is similar (Mk. 7:21). The Lord likely said the same thing twice, repeating phrases in sentences, and repeating whole sentences with slight differences. This was inevitable in speaking without speech reinforcement and with much background noise. Further, given the illiteracy of the audience and the newness of the ideas being presented, any teacher would have repeated the ideas several times over, using slightly different words. I have often found myself doing this when speaking in a missionary context to illiterate people. Once I replayed a recording of my preaching, and noticed myself doing this. From then on, I never had much problem with the fact that the parallel records in the Gospels often use different words and phrases for the same ideas. And of course it's highly likely the Lord spoke in Aramaic, and Matthew and Mark are as it were translating that Aramaic into literary Greek. It's absolutely legitimate to translate an original spoken word in various ways, indeed it would appear suspicious, forced and unnatural if the Gospel writers used precisely the same Greek to translate the Lord's original Aramaic.

The Greek for "thoughts" means reasonings or disputings (s.w. Phil. 2:14). The Lord surely had in mind the cunning but carnal reasoning of the Pharisees which is mentioned at the start of this section (15:1-6). There are separate Greek words used here for "evil" and "thoughts"; but every single one of the 14 New Testament usages of the word *dialogismos* ("thoughts") is in a distinctly sinful context (Mk. 7:21; Lk. 2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46,47; 24:38; Rom. 1:21; 14:1; 1 Cor. 3:20; Phil. 2:14; 1 Tim. 2:8; James 2:4). Yet the word itself has no moral overtone, it means simply 'to think / reason'. But the point is, that human thinking is so often sinful, and is the root cause of sinful behaviour.

Murders, adulteries, sexual immorality, thefts, false witness and slander- Notice the purposeful juxtaposition of bad *thinking* next to murder. This confirms the Lord's constant emphasis that the thought is equivalent to the action in His judgment. Murder, adultery and fornication have already been defined in the Sermon on the Mount as being essentially performed

in the heart. The list of seven sins here is surely intended to encompass all sin in totality (seven)- whatever specific sin there may be, it originated in a human heart.

15:20 *These are the things which defile the man - but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man*- The emphasis may be upon the word "hands". The idea would then be that it is the heart which requires washing, rather than hands. In this case the Lord would be directing their minds to Jer. 4:14: "O Jerusalem [note the Pharisees in question were from Jerusalem, Mt. 15:1], wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts dwell within you?". But this of course begs the question- how can a man wash his own heart? Surely it needs the Father and Son to do this for us. The whole offer of Jesus is of a *holy* spirit or heart to be given to those who believe in Him. Perhaps John's equivalent of this section of teaching is in the repeated mention he makes of the Greek *nipto*, to wash- the same word used here in Mt. 15:2. John records how utterly essential it is for the disciple to allow the Lord Jesus to wash *them* (Jn. 13:5,6,8,10,12,14, and also in the record of the cleansing of the blind man in Jn. 9:7,11,15). The cleansing of the heart in and by Christ is implied by the teaching recorded here in Mt. 15, but only made explicit in John's Gospel.

The Greek *koinoo* ["defiles"] strictly means 'to make common'. The later New Testament uses it in a quite different and spiritual way, speaking of how there is a "common faith" (Tit. 1:4; Jude 3) which means that the community of believers are bound together by what they have "in common" (Acts 2:44; 4:32). The Lord's new Israel had new principles. If the heart was cleansed, then the focus moved from fear of collective *defilement* to rejoicing in and experiencing what we have *in common* in Christ.

15:21 *And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon*- The words is used of fleeing persecution or avoiding difficult circumstances (Mt. 2:12-14,22) and often about Jesus (Mt. 4:12; 12:15 “when Jesus knew it, He *withdrew Himself*”; 14:13 “When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence”). We get the sense of the Lord desperately needing to be away from the crowds, out of the limelight, alone with the Father and the disciples. And yet so often when He makes such a withdrawal, the crowds follow Him, or human need is felt by Him to an almost overpowering extent, so that He again comes into the public view. This need to ‘withdraw’ may simply have been from basic human fatigue, both physical and psychological. Or there may also have been the desire to focus upon training the twelve rather than being side-tracked by trying to give surface level fragments of teaching to the crowds who were clearly more interested in miracles than in His teaching. Recall how at the end of chapter 12 and from chapter 13 onwards, the Lord turned away

from the crowds towards the minority who had responded. But whatever the reason, His responsiveness to human need and potential was amazing.

The Lord had emphasized earlier that His mission was not to the Gentiles but to the lost sheep of Israel. Perhaps He decided to go to Gentile areas in order to avoid engagement with the crowds and focus upon the disciples. But again, His humanity is indicated by the fact that even that plan had an outcome that He didn't foresee, in that there He met a Gentile woman who so deeply impressed Him by her perception that He healed her daughter.

15:22- see on 18:11.
And a Canaanite woman- Canaanite women are presented in the Old Testament as very much Israel's *femmes fatales*. Nobody else is described in the New Testament as a person "of Canaan" (see note on 10:4). Indeed it would appear a term not commonly in use at the time. It is therefore used in order to create associations in Biblically aware minds that here was a woman whom classically, a believer should beware of and give a wide berth to. This fits with the inversion of stereotypes and shattering of expectations which this incident presents. For the Lord had gone to this Gentile area expecting to get a break from engagement with people, because His mission was not to the Gentiles (see on :21 *Tyre and Sidon*).

From that region came out- AV "Came out of the same region". The phrase is awkward and lengthy if the intention was simply to convey the idea that she was a local woman, a woman from that area. *Exerchomai apo* ("Came out of") implies a proceeding forth from, and is even translated "escape". *Apo* has the sense of cessation, completion, separation, departure. Further, the Greek word translated "region" or "coasts" (AV) is not the same as that used to describe the region in :21. It strictly means a boundary or border. The impression we get is of a woman who lived in the area and yet had radically come out of it. Perhaps the awkward phrase is used to create this impression- that this Gentile woman had come out of her environment in the hope of connecting with the God of Israel. One could just about translate it with integrity: "A woman of Canaan who had emigrated out from that very area...".

And was crying: Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David- These were the very words used by the blind men of Mt. 9:27. Perhaps she was inspired by them, or at least the rumours she had heard of them, their understanding and their healing. See on 9:27 concerning the connection between David and mercy. "Lord"*, Kurios,* is used about men in passages like Acts 25:26; Gal. 4:1; Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22 and Rom. 14:4, so it is nothing but intellectual desperation which leads Trinitarians to claim that

the use of *kurios* means that people thought Jesus was God. The confession of Jesus as Lord was however a fundamental part of conversion to Christianity in the early church. To openly accept Him as Lord of human life was and is the essence of the Christian call. To call upon Him as Lord is presented in the later New Testament as the essence of conversion to Him (Acts 2:21; 22:16; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5). The Gospels are full of examples of men and women who called upon Jesus as "Lord" during His ministry, and these individuals are being set up as the prototypes of those who would later convert to Him. The Gospel writers such as Matthew were preaching towards conversion, towards men and women calling upon Jesus as Lord in baptism and devotion to His Name. So the people they record doing this during His ministry are presented as role models to be followed by their audience. But those whom Matthew records as calling upon Jesus as *kurios* are those on the edge of Jewish society- a leper (8:2), a Gentile centurion (8:6,8), blind men (9:28)- and now this Canaanite woman. Matthew emphasizes three times that she repeatedly called Jesus "Lord" (15:22,25,27). In a society where religion was largely a hobby for men, it was quite radical thinking to present a female role model- let alone a Gentile one. See on :27 *masters' table.*

The parable of Mt. 18:33 uses this same phrase "Have mercy on me" and presents it as the very essence of the Gospel. We all beg the Lord to "have mercy on me", and are to likewise reflect that mercy to others. Again, the woman is being presented as typical of all who would come to Christ. And the word is used in the later New Testament about how all in Christ have received such personal mercy (1 Tim. 1:13,16; 1 Pet. 2:10). But the request was in fact for her *daughter*. The parent is totally identified with the sick child, and in this we see the absolute psychological credibility of the record.

My daughter is severely oppressed by a demon- The very same words were repeated by the man of 17:15. He likewise asked for *mercy* to be shown to his *son*, as she had asked for her daughter, because he was likewise "badly vexed" (the same two Greek words are used). Just as she was inspired by the blind men of 9:27 (see above), so she in her turn inspired another man who heard of her story. This is how communities can get into an upward spiral of spiritual growth. The idea was that a demon had possessed the daughter and was controlling her, perhaps [as was thought] convulsing her. However, today we understand what causes convulsions- and it isn't demons. The language of being controlled by demons is clearly phenomenological, the language of the day for illnesses which were otherwise inexplicable to the people of the time. The healing of the daughter resulted in her being "whole" or "healed" (:28). The implied 'driving out of demons' was simply another way of saying she was cured.

15:23- see on 14:15.
But he did not answer her- Another case of the apparent silence of the Lord, seen also in His not coming immediately to Lazarus when He received news of his sickness, His appearance of walking past the drowning disciples on the lake, and making as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus (cp. Is. 30:18). And, we might add, in His apparent delay in returning to establish the Kingdom, along with countless examples from human lives today. But this delay and silence is not at all from disinterest and hard heartedness, let alone distraction with other issues. We are accustomed to human lack of response to us being because of those things, and we can too easily assume that the Lord's apparent lack of response is for similar reasons. But the Bible, and the Gospels especially, surely make it clear that the lack of response is indeed only apparent- it is ultimately part of a larger spiritual plan for our eternal good at our latter end. In this case, the silence elicited in the woman a depth of understanding and intensity of hope and faith which perhaps she had not had previously. For she didn't shrug and walk away, muttering that all Jews were snobs and elitists. Instead, she considered that indeed, she was not worthy of any response, and yet seeing that this Son of David was the epitome of God's grace, she renewed her faith and appeal. Instead of shrugging and walking off, "she worshipped Him" (:25), in the spirit of Job, who said he would trust God even if He slew him (Job 13:15). And was rewarded.

And his disciples came [pros-erchomai] and begged him, saying- The woman "came" (*erchomai*) and worshipped Him (:25). The coming of the disciples to Jesus and begging Him (to send the woman away) *and being rejected* is clearly matched in the record by the woman coming to Jesus (a related word is used), begging Him- *and having her request accepted*. Again, the Gospel writers are presenting themselves negatively, in humility recognizing that their way of rejecting the Gentiles and turning people away was *wrong*. This of course had great significance in the communities of believers which were formed as a result of Matthew's Gospel being believed. For the tendency to turn away Gentile believers was very strong.

Send her away- The very word the disciples had recently used in requesting the Lord to 'send away' the hungry crowds (14:15). He intended them to learn from their mistake, and so providentially they were presented with another case of someone whom they were tempted to "send away". And they failed the test. And so in the feeding of the 4000 which now follows in the record, they are again presented with a temptation to "send away" the crowds (15:32)- and again, they fail. Surely Matthew is bringing out the point that they had failed miserably to grasp this point- that the Lord's followers are tempted to send away those

whom He will not send away. This point was of extreme practical relevance amongst groups of Jewish converts who were tempted to 'send away' Gentile converts from table fellowship. It's just possible that the disciples were using the term "send away" in the sense that it is sometimes used elsewhere- to loose, to send away with the request granted (18:27; Lk. 13:12; 14:4). But it seems to me from the surrounding context of the sending away of the crowds that we are intended to read this as the disciples yet again wanting someone to be refused by Jesus, when He wanted to accept them.

For she cries out after us- The Greek *opisthen*, "after", really means 'behind'; and the word used for 'crying' is literally 'to growl or croak'. This is the language of an unwanted dog running behind men and irritating them with the noise of its barking. This paves the way for the language of the woman as a pestering dog (see on :25 *worshipped Him*). But there is also a sadly typical attitude displayed here- 'This person is irritating *us*, therefore, we deny them a relationship with the Lord personally'. So many of those called to Christ are indeed irritating types- it is the 'normal', calm, self-satisfied types who fail to perceive their need for Him.

15:24 *But he answered and said: I was only sent*- The Lord Jesus, who spoke and acted the words of God, was clearly willing to change His position depending on human response. He initially declined to heal the daughter of the Canaanite woman because, as He clearly stated, He had been sent *only* unto "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"; and it was not appropriate, He said, to take the food from those children and feed it to Gentile dogs (Mt. 14:24,26). He may well have had in mind His own principle of not throwing pearls before swine [Gk. 'wild dogs'] (Mt. 7:6). But… He changed. He healed the woman's daughter. He was so deeply impressed with her perception and faith that He changed the operation of His principles.

To the lost sheep of the house of Israel- The ambiguous genitive here could mean that the lost sheep *were* the house of Israel; or that the lost sheep had been lost *by* the house of Israel. The *apollumi* sheep means more than 'lost' as in confused and in the wrong place; the word has the distinct sense of 'destroyed' or 'dead'. The Lord's mission was almost to resurrect the slain sheep of Israel.

15:25 *But she came and knelt before him, saying: Lord! Help me!*- The kneeling was worship. The Greek *proskuneo* is defined by Strong as meaning "to lick like a dog licking his master's hand, to crouch". This paved the way for the Lord's response, that it was not appropriate to cast the children's food to the dogs. And she responds that she is as a dog

under the children's table (:27). Her posture, therefore, was perhaps consciously intended to mimic a crouching dog. Her worship was not in song, but simply in recognizing that He alone can "help".

The Canaanite woman simply prayed: "Lord, help me". The Lord's response was to heal her daughter, with the comment: "Be it unto you even as you wish" (Mt. 15:25,28). She didn't specifically ask for anything, she just stated her problem, but the Lord understood her few words as expressing her hidden will, and treated this as her specific prayer request. And here we have untold comfort for those who feel (needlessly) that they are not good at praying because they're not good at verbalizing.

15:26 *And he answered and said: It is not right to take the children's bread*- The idea could be of taking the food the children were eating, and giving it to the dogs. Or, the Greek could equally mean 'the food intended for the children'. In this case, the Lord would be implying that He had received food to give to the children, and it was inappropriate for Him to instead throw it to the dogs rather than giving it to the children.
The *artos*, "bread", is specifically bread rather than food in general. The bread obtained by the Lord is easily understandable as salvation; Judaism expected Messiah to bring manna for Israel, and the Lord makes it clear in John 6 that the manna He would give was Himself and salvation in Him. The bread of Israel was to be the salvation of the world, but it was only given to the world because of Israel's rejection of it. In this we see the economy of God, how even through human rejection of the Gospel, the final purpose of God towards salvation is still furthered.

And cast it to the dogs- The Lord so respected Israel that He felt giving the Gospel to the Gentiles instead of them was like casting good food to dogs (Mk. 7:27). Israel (the children) didn't want to eat, but the Lord painted them as if they did. The "crumb" that was cast to the dogs was a great miracle; but Christ saw that as only a crumb of the huge meal that was potentially prepared for Israel. It seems the idea here is meant to be connected with His invitation to us to sit at table with Him and share the meal, both now (Lk. 14:8) and in the Kingdom (Lk. 12:37). Just one crumb of the Lord's meal is a mighty miracle, and yet we are asked to sit down and eat the whole meal with Him: as symbolised in our eating of "the Lord's supper". This is an eloquent picture of the greatness of our position as members of His table now, as well as in the future.

15:27 *But she said*- Sometimes what is recorded as being actually said may be only a summary of the real words (consider what the Canaanite woman actually said: Mt. 15:27 cp. Mk. 7:28).

Yes, Lord- A word signifying her assent to what the Lord had just said. She agreed with the position that the bread of salvation was primarily for Israel and that Gentiles were but dogs.

But even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table- She perceived the healing of her daughter as a mere "crumb" compared to the bread of the Kingdom, full salvation, which had been obtained for Israel by Jesus. She perceived too that that great salvation had been rejected by them, or at best, treated carelessly and without due respect, in that crumbs had fallen to her. The Lord at the end of Matthew 12 and throughout His subsequent parables of chapter 13 had explained how Israel had rejected the Gospel, and that He was therefore turning to the disciples for response. The parables of Matthew 13 were His attempt to help the disciples come to terms with the fact that in reality, Israel had rejected John's message. But this woman perceived it well, and thereby perceived that the bread of salvation must therefore be available to the Gentiles if Israel didn't want it. In this she was far ahead of the disciples themselves. It could be argued that she was not *seeking* 'crumbs', in the sense of equating the hoped for healing with the crumbs. It could be that she is saying that she is already eating of those crumbs, in that she felt she was feeding on whatever small parts of the bread of salvation were possible for her as a Gentile. She says that the dogs *are eating* the crumbs- rather than begging for them. The Lord was so deeply impressed by the woman's use of metaphor that He Himself builds it into a later parable- Lazarus the beggar desired to eat the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table (Lk. 16:21). The rich man clearly represents Judaism, which was to be condemned and rejected, whilst the beggar was saved. In this we see the Lord's humility as well as His sensitivity; He was deeply impressed by the woman, and absorbed her use of metaphor into His own mental material.

We can too easily assume that she is considering the Jewish children sitting at the table as the masters of the Gentiles. But she uses *kurios* for 'master', and I noted on :22 that she is recorded three times here as addressing Jesus as *kurios,* "Lord". There is no Biblical nor spiritual warrant for thinking of Jews as 'masters' or 'lords' of the Gentiles. Her triple use of *kurios* regarding the Lord Jesus surely suggests that she is thinking of *His* table, with the bread of Israel's salvation placed upon it *by Him*, as the lord of the house and the feast- with the Jewish children sitting disinterested and disrespectfully at the table, throwing the food to the eager dogs beneath the table. It was exactly the attitude of the Lord Jesus to table fellowship, His eating with Gentiles and sinners, which was what led the children of Israel to reject Him. And this incident is sandwiched between the records of the feeding miracles, in which the

Lord dealt His bread to all and sundry, including Gentiles. This amazing woman accepted Jesus as her Lord even though she felt that she was not fit to sit at His table; she got to be at His table by being as a dog. This amazing devotion to her Lord, fully accepting the barriers there were between them brought about by ethnic birth circumstances beyond her control- resulted in the Lord tearing down those barriers. Significantly, Paul uses the very same Greek words in 1 Cor. 10:21 about eating at the Lord's table- and he has the breaking of bread service in mind. The sharing of table fellowship with Gentiles was a highly divisive issue in the communities of Jewish Christians who first responded to Matthew's Gospel. He is surely making the point that in a strange way, Gentiles partook of the Lord's table in that even the dogs under the table still eat what is on the table. And this happened even during the Lord's ministry. They were "under the table" (Mk. 7:28)- but still *at* the table.

15:28 *Then Jesus answered*- This has been said in :23,25 and :26. His responsiveness to human words, actions and perceptions was clearly very impressive to Matthew. And this Lord is our Lord.

O woman, great is your faith- The Lord commended the Canaanite woman for her understanding of the Hope of Israel and the Gentile's place in it: "Great is your faith" (Mt. 15:28); great was her understanding, and therefore her faith. Mark records that the Lord also said: "For this saying go your way; the demon is gone out of your daughter" (Mk. 7:29). This shows the value which the Lord placed on correct understanding. The Gentile woman had seen the feeding of the 5,000 and *understood* the implications of the lesson which the Lord was teaching. We get the feeling that the Lord was *overjoyed* at her perception and therefore made an exception to His rule of not being sent at that time to the Gentiles, but to the house of Israel.

Be it done to you even as you wish. And her daughter was healed from that moment- It was done unto her daughter, for her sake- an example of a third party being healed or blessed by the Lord in response to the faith of another person (see Mk. 2:5 for another example- the paralyzed man was cured for the sake of the faith of his friends). This sets a challenging precedent for us in our prayers for others. John seems to consciously allude to the Lord's words here when recording how the Lord stated a general principle, that if His words abide in us "You shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7; see too Mt. 18:19). The Lord was setting up that woman as the role model of all who would believe in Him. His words abode in her- see comment on *from that very hour*. Mark adds: "The demon is gone out of your daughter". The Lord Jesus used well known medical techniques in His ministry (Mk. 7:33; Jn.

9:6); not because He needed to use them, but in order to somehow get His hearers at ease. And so, it seems to me, He used the language of demons. He dealt with people in terms which they would be able to accept.

We get the impression that the woman didn't have her daughter with her. She had to go home believing in the Lord's words, and according to that faith it was given to her.

15:29 *And Jesus departed from there and came near to the Sea of Galilee*- The Greek could imply a relocation, as if He had been based in that Gentile area and now returned to spend time in Galilee.

And he went up the mountain and sat there- Reminiscent of the giving of the sermon on the Mount, the earlier feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:3 "Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat"), and also His sitting upon the Mount of Olives teaching (Mt. 24:3). Sitting on a mountain was metaphorical for reigning (Rev. 17:9). Although His political Kingdom had not yet come, in His teaching He was as it were ruling over His people- which is exactly the sense in which He is now ruling over us His king-dom, those under the domain of His teaching and rulership as Lord and King.

15:30 *And there came to him great crowds*- The use of the Greek word *ochlos* is perhaps intended to be associated with the very similar word *oichos*, family. The Lord was seeking to turn those multitudes of variously motivated people into a family- His ecclesia.

Having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed and many others- This is an intentional echo of the Kingdom prophecy of Is. 35:5,6, where we read of the healing of "the blind... the deaf... the lame... the dumb". The Lord purposefully healed multitudes of lame and blind, and allowed them to come to Him in the temple (Mt. 21:14). His acted out message was clearly that those who were despised as unfit for God’s service were now being welcomed by Him into that service. The lame and blind were despised because they couldn’t work. They had to rely on the grace of others. Here again is a crucial teaching: those called are those who can’t do the works, but depend upon grace.

And they put them down- Another touch of the eye witness account. For they had just carried handicapped people up a mountainside.

At his feet, and he healed them- This is not merely an incidental description. To be *para pous* (“at the feet of”) a person was significant- it was a declaration of their seniority as a leader and teacher (Lk. 7:38; 8:35,41; 10:39; 17:16; Acts 4:35,37; 5:2; 7:58; 22:3). The term would

surely not have been used here unless it has that sense. The point is perhaps that people were brought to Jesus, with all the healing and teaching that implies, because of the effort of third parties for them.

15:31 *So much so that the crowd wondered*- They had struggled to carry those sick and handicapped folk up a mountainside, casting them down in exhaustion at the Lord's feet (see on :30). Surely they did so because they believed. Precisely what they hoped and prayed for was given- hence the record labours the point that the dumb *spoke*, the blind *saw*, the lame *walked*, the maimed were *made whole*. And yet when they saw the fulfilment of what they had hoped and prayed for, they "wondered". Rather like the believers praying for Peter's release and then being amazed when he appeared at the door. We can genuinely believe and even act according to that faith, and yet not have the faith which calmly envisages the answer as having effectively been already given.

When they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel- The implication is therefore that these were Gentiles. The Lord therefore broke His bread with non-Jews; see digression on 14:20.

The account of the feeding of the 4000 is very similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. Therefore see notes on 14:14-21.

15:32 *Then Jesus called his disciples to him, and said*- We often meet this note in the Gospels. The implication is surely that if discipleship involves being with and following Jesus, then the disciples are therefore recording their own weakness in noting that they were often *not* with Jesus and had to be called unto Him. And it is observable that in many of the cases of being called to Him, they were somehow astray in action or attitude- separated from Him not just physically. The Greek specifically means 'to call towards', and so the pattern is established of the Lord's basic call being repeated throughout the course of our discipleship.

I have compassion on the crowd- Reflect how the Lord called His men unto Him, and informed them that He had compassion on the hungry multitude. He said no more than that. But the disciples immediately started bleating on about how there was no way they had the money nor ability to arrange so much bread in a deserted place (Mk. 8:2). They understood that their Lord had transferred His compassion onto them; all that was true of Him became true for them. *He* wanted to feed the multitude; *He* was feeling compassionate to the crowd; so, axiomatically, so must they. And so must we today, as we face the crowds too. Whatever are the feelings, the mind, of Jesus towards this world; so must

our mind be. And He came, without controversy, above all to give His all, to die, for this world's redemption.

Because they have been with me now- AV "Continue with Me". The same word is used about believers 'cleaving unto' Jesus (Acts 11:23). The Lord uses the same word about His wish for the disciples to continue with Him in the heat of temptation in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:38), and it is the same word used so often in John for 'abiding' with Christ. The Lord was more sceptical about the (Jewish) crowd in the earlier feeding miracle (of the 5000), later commenting that their interest was largely in the food. This more Gentile crowd (see on :31) He felt were abiding with Him in a more spiritual sense.

Three days- The provision of manna, the bread of salvation, after three days… this is surely prophetic of the resurrection. The Lord could have fed them at the end of the first day- three days is a long time not to eat, and they were at the point of losing consciousness due to lack of food ("they will faint in the way"). The Lord surely didn't provide food earlier in order to prove the level of interest. Surely many did walk away in search of food. But 4000 (at least) remained. It certainly was a great expression of sincere interest in the Lord's message, and compares favourably to that of the crowd of 5000, who were fed after only a few hours. The disciples' desire to dismiss this extraordinary group therefore appears even worse.

And have nothing to eat- The same Greek phrase is on the Lord's lips in Mt. 25:32, where He says that condemnation awaits the man who gives 'nothing to eat' to those who are hungry. The disciples like many of us assume automatically that it can't be their problem to provide others' needs if they don't have what is required materially. But the connection between this verse and Mt. 25:32 puts that assumption under a spotlight. Even if we do not have what is needed, our confrontation with that need requires to exercise faith that that need will be resolved. And the resolution of it may well depend upon our *faith*. This doesn't mean that we ask that material resources are dropped from Heaven into *our* hands, but rather than they will be provided in order to meet the need.

I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way- Mark adds "Because some of them had come from afar" (Mk. 8:3). This again is a hint at Gentile presence in the crowd- see on :31.

15:33 *And the disciples said to him: Where can we get so many loaves in this deserted place to fill so great a crowd?*
- "From whence shall we get bread here in the wilderness?" (AV) is how

Peter / Mark recorded their question to the Lord (Mk. 8:4). But the wording is so very similar to the LXX of Ex. 16:3, where a faithless Israel asked the same of Moses; and Moses responded, as did the Lord, in providing bread from Heaven. Did the disciples actually say those words? Would they really have said the very words which Israel did in one of their lowest ebbs of faith and understanding? My suggestion is that they did indeed say something similar in essence, but Mark / Peter purposefully recorded it in terms which highlight the similarity with unbelieving Israel- to as it were emphasize how weak the disciples were at that point. Peter was the public leader of the early ecclesia, and yet the Gospels all emphasise his weaknesses. The Gospels all stress the disciples' lack of spirituality, their primitive earthiness in comparison to the matchless moral glory of God's Son, their slowness to understand the cross. But there are also more studied references to their failures. Mark's account of their words at the feeding of the crowd is shot through with reference to the attitude of faithless Israel in the wilderness: "Where shall we ['And this includes me, Mark...this is what we said to Him...'] get bread to satisfy this people in the wilderness?". We must note that the very same word "Whence…?" was used by the disciples before the feeding of the 5000 earlier (Jn. 6:5). The answer to the question then had been 'From Heaven'. But the repeated situation didn't seem to register with the disciples. Just as circumstances repeat in our lives too, but we don't perceive it.

Mark has 'Whence can a man…" (Mk. 8:4). Their reasoning was that no *man* could meet this huge need, and so therefore, they naturally couldn't meet it- for they were only men. Man can't, therefore we can't. And so our reasoning goes so often. Something is humanly impossible, therefore it is impossible to me, because I am human. The life and person of the Lord Jesus challenged this thinking very deeply. For He was fully human, of our nature, our representative, and yet did super-human things. With God's manifestation and involvement in human life, then human beings can achieve that which is humanly impossible. And this was exemplified supremely in the Lord Jesus, once we appreciate He was of our nature and not some Divine puppet playing a mere role- as required by Trinitarian theology.

They were indeed "filled" (:37). The Lord has just said to the Gentile woman that the Jews must first be "filled" (s.w. Mk. 7:27) before the Gentile dogs are fed. In Matthew 15, the feeding of the 4000 comes straight after the Lord's encounter with that woman. It seems the point is that the Lord judged that the time had now come to fill the Gentiles. For this was largely a Gentile crowd (see on :31).

15:34 *And Jesus said to them: How many loaves have you? And they said: Seven, and a few small fish*- The feeding of the 4000 is clearly

recorded in the same style and with much the same language as the feeding of the 5000. We are surely intended to place the events together. Five loaves were used in the healing of the 5000, and seven here- making a total of 12 loaves. Jewish minds would surely have thought of the 12 loaves on the table of showbread (Lev. 24:5). Moses personally was to "set them" on the table in rows (Lev. 24:1,6), which connects with how the loaves were "set" before the people (Mk. 8:6), who at the feeding of the 5000 were set down in rows (Mk. 6:40 Gk.). The hint was clearly that the most sacred bread of Judaism, the 12 loaves of the showbread, were being set before Gentiles, women, children and secular Jews- by non-priests, the disciples. And all were welcome to partake, without testing their qualification. The rending of the veil into the Most Holy at the Lord's death was only really making public that which the Lord had already achieved in His life.

The Lord's teaching style continually revolved around posing explicit and implicit questions to His hearers, such as "How many loaves do you have?". John's Gospel contains a total of 161 questions; and one brief passage in Mark (Mk. 8:14-21- the parallel to this section in Matthew) records how the Lord asked seven questions in quick succession. In this sense, the Lord Jesus intended to be intrusive into human life; He penetrates the depths of our being. His call to pick up a cross and follow Him was radical- so radical, that His hearers both then and now tended to [even unconsciously] negate the totally radical import of His demands.

Mark's record speaks as if the fish were something of an afterthought (Mk. 8:7); the use of the diminutive word for *little* fish suggests they thought them hardly worth mentioning. The stress (in Mark) is that *they* had a few small fish. The situation is of course purposefully similar to that of the feeding of the 5000. They were really intended to learn from it. But they didn't. There were some differences, and one of them was that this time, their own small amount of food was used rather than that of the boy. The Lord was seeking to show that what little they personally had, fish they had personally caught but felt inadequate for the task, could and would be used by Him in order to meet the hunger of the Gentile world.

15:35 *And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground*- The Greek really means to recline at table. This is another indication that He was presenting as it were the Messianic banquet, and fellowshipping at table in a spiritual sense with whoever wished to be present. See the digression at 14:20.

15:36 *He took the seven loaves and the fish; and he gave thanks and*

broke the bread and gave it to the disciples- The same Greek words for 'took' and 'loaves' have just been used in 15:26, where the Lord told the Gentile woman that it was not appropriate to 'take' the 'bread' (s.w. "loaves") intended for Israel and give them to the Gentiles. But now, just ten verses later in the narrative, He does just that (bearing in mind the evidence that this is a partly Gentile crowd). The impression is surely that the woman's spiritual perception deeply impressed the Lord, to the point that He decided the time had come to begin giving Israel's bread to the Gentiles. This openness in both the Father and Son is a function of their supreme sensitivity to men. See on 16:5.

And the disciples gave them to the crowds- The Lord gave the broken bread to the disciples, eloquently speaking of the gift of His life. They in their turn "did set before the people" (Mk. 8:6). We must pass on that which was given to us by the Lord. Paul is our example in this (1 Cor. 11:23). We must, of course, have a valid relationship with the Lord in the first place, feeling we have definitely received something from Him, if we are to pass it on. The Greek term for "set before" recurs in 1 Tim. 1:18 and 2 Tim. 2:2 concerning how we simply *must* pass on the word which has been given to us. Quite simply, if we've really heard it, really received it, we must pass it on. Paul saw the breaking of bread prefigured in Christ's feeding of the 4000 (Mt. 15:36 = 1 Cor. 11:24).

15:37 *And they all ate and were filled*- See on :33 *to fill*.

And they collected- According to Mk. 8:19-21, one of the reasons behind the Lord telling them to do this was simply to make them more deeply aware of the huge amount of bread which the Lord had created- to the point that they should realize that things like bread, and indeed all physical externalities, were just ultimately insignificant to the Lord. "And they reasoned one with another, saying: It is because we have no bread... When I broke the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you gather? They said to Him: Twelve. And when the seven among the four thousand, how many basketfuls of broken pieces did you gather? And they said to Him: Seven. And He said to them: How is it that you do not yet understand?". Clearly the Lord was carefully working out a plan of spiritual education for them- and they failed to respond well to it. He does the same in our lives, although we may be barely perceptive that the process is even running.

What was left over of the broken pieces- seven baskets full!
- Literally, 'the breakages'. The word is only ever used in the Gospels about the broken pieces of bread from the feeding miracles. The related verb *klao*, to break, is used only of the 'breaking of bread' in the feeding

miracles, and every other occurrence in the New Testament concerns the breaking of bread service in memory of Jesus (Mt. 26:26; Mk. 14:22; Lk. 22:19; 24:30; Acts 2:46; 20:7,11; 27:35; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:24). Clearly the breaking of bread in the miracles is intended to be seen as programmatic for the later 'breaking of bread' services. In this connection it becomes highly significant that there were Gentiles participating, along with women and children, and there was no 'test of fellowship' operated. The simple fact people wanted to be present around Jesus was enough.

"what was left over" is Gk. 'super-abounded'. This is noted in all five records of the feeding miracles. The poor notice wastage of food, and this was the wastage of food *extraordinaire*. But such super generosity is the hallmark of God's activity, as it should be a feature of our spirit too. The prodigal recalled how there was always 'an abundance of loaves' with the Father (Gk. "bread to the full", AV; Lk. 15:16).

The Greek of this verse is identical to the conclusion concerning the feeding of the 5000 in 14:20. The similarity between the two feeding miracles is very pointed and extensive. The point may simply be that the Lord was consciously repeating a situation so that the disciples would have the chance to put into practice what they should have learnt from the earlier situation. This principle would explain the strong sense of *déjà vu* which surely all of us have observed in the course of our lives.

The crowd were filled, totally satiated; and the leftover food *filled* the baskets. The impression is given of superabundance of provision.

15:38 *And besides women and children*- Gk. 'at a space from'. This was literally true, in that women and children would have sat separately from the men. At least 10,000 people would've been present in total.

They that had eaten were four thousand men- Eating is a consciously presented theme in this chapter. The disciples are condemned for eating in an unclean manner (15:2), the Gentile woman eats the crumbs rejected by the Jews (15:27), and now a huge crowd of Gentiles (see on :31) including women and children (the socially and religiously marginalized) also "eat". The incident is surely placed next to that of the Gentile woman eating the 'crumbs' in :27 in order to show the eagerness of the Gentiles for the bread of Israel. The amazing example of going three days without food in order to receive spiritual food (:31) demonstrated beyond doubt the legitimacy of Gentile interest in the Messianic bread / manna of the Kingdom.

The way the number of eaters is presented at the end of the meal might suggest that this is the equivalent of a bill being presented at the

conclusion of a meal. If this is the case, then the hint would be towards Is. 55:1,2, where again we have the theme of free provision of food, and being utterly filled / satisfied: "Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness".

15:39 *And he sent away the crowds, boarded the boat and went into the region of Magdalla*- The Greek *horion* definitely means a border, rather like a state line in North America. Matthew especially uses the term, 7 times in all; it only occurs twice in the other Gospels, and only one other time in the New Testament. At the borders of the regions there were often customs posts through which travellers must pass. Matthew had once 'sat at the customs table', and likely knew these crossing points, or at least, took note of them as they passed through them. This is yet another incidental evidence of the veracity of the records- the Gospel of Matthew really was written as it claims, by a tax collector called Matthew- albeit under Divine inspiration.

CHAPTER 16

16:1 *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees*- The force of *kai* ("also") is that they were united. Here we see the theme being developed of how groups who were otherwise against each other united against the Lord as their common enemy. This came to its ultimate term in the Lord's crucifixion, where even Pilate and Herod became friends (Lk. 23:12). Acts 4:27 comments that not only Pilate and Herod, but even Jews and Gentiles, were gathered together in unity against Him. This of course was a parody of how in the sphere of God's Kingdom, Jew and Gentile were brought together in Christ- for Him, rather than against Him. All that is true of God's sphere of operation appears to have its parody in the system of the world.

Came to test him- This was exactly the situation in the wilderness temptations, strengthening the impression that the source of the temptation was the 'Satan' or adversary of Jewish thinking and the Jewish system.

And asked him to show them a sign- This appears an exact repetition of the situation in 12:38,39- the same words are used. The point is simply that the same requests and answers were given at different times throughout the Lord's ministry. That seems to me to have the ring of truth- for anyone with any missionary experience will nod their head and recall how often that has been their experience. And yet the critics love to make elaborate claims based on the similarity with 12:38,39. It simply depends with what spirit we come to the records- those who believe in inspiration will see circumstantial evidence for veracity in such things, whereas those bent on downgrading the Gospels to human, fallible records will use the same material to find fault.

From Heaven- The implication was that the Lord's miraculous signs were from 'satan', from beneath rather than from above. This was tantamount to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. See notes on 12:38,39.

16:2 *But he answered and said to them: When it is evening, you say: It will be fair weather, for the sky is red*- The Lord's examples relate to reading the appearance of the sky. This is His answer to their request for a "sign *from Heaven*"- bearing in mind that in Hebrew and Aramaic, the words for 'sky' and 'Heaven' as in the abode of God are the same. They realized that the same sign- the redness of the sky- could signify two different things. The sign is specifically defined as being the sign of Jonah- the resurrection of Christ (12:38,39). If they perceived the sign of reddened sky in the evening, then it was a sign of “fair weather”. The word “weather” is an insertion from the translators and reflects no original Greek word. Most other usages of the Greek for “fair” refer to acceptance

with God: "*Well done* (s.w. "fair") good and faithful servant" (Mt. 25:21,23); "*Well* (s.w. "fair"), you good servant" (Lk. 19:17; and see Acts 15:29; Eph. 6:3). If they read that sign right in the evening, then their morning would be 'fair'- acceptance with God. But if it was in the morning that they saw the sign, then there would be "foul weather" (:3). Again, "weather" is an insertion by the translators, but the Greek really refers to heavy rain- it is translated "tempest" or "storm" in Acts 27:20, and where it is elsewhere translated "winter", the literal sense would be 'rainy season'. The language of rain, storm and tempest recalls Noah's flood and is a clear metaphor for condemnation. The Lord is observing that the same sign can portend two different destinies- depending upon when it is perceived. The sign is that of Jonah, and the resurrection of Jesus. If they perceived that in the evening, before the night time and darkness of death- then that sign would mean their salvation and blessing. But if only in the morning, after His resurrection- then it meant the rainstorm of condemnation for them.

16:3 *And in the morning: It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening*- See on 16:2.

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky- AV "You hypocrites". Hypocrisy may seem a strange charge to level at men who could read the weather but did not want to perceive that they were Nineveh with Jonah in their midst; and according to their response to the Lord's resurrection, their eternity would be decided. The charge of hypocrisy would seem to me to imply that they realized indeed who Jesus was, but were acting as if they didn't. The Lord said as much in designing a later parable to have the Jews saying "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (Mt. 21:38). Another option is that their ability to read basic signs in the weather made them responsible to discerning who Christ was and their need to repent; and to not use our potential abilities is perhaps seen by the Lord as hypocrisy.

But you cannot interpret the signs of the times- The "sign[s] of the times" which they wanted but couldn't discern can be seen as the whole work of Jesus, rather than specifically the signs of His coming again. The "sign[s]" which they sought for were in front of them at the time of their asking for them. They therefore cannot really refer to fulfilled latter day prophecies. The lesson is that as farmers and shepherds act accordingly as they interpret the weather, so we ought to respond to the resurrection of Christ [cp. that of Jonah], because it portends the return of Christ in judgment. And the outcome of that sign was either to their blessing ["fair weather"] or condemnation [rainy / foul weather]. There is no reason to think that "signs" and "times" have to be read as plurals. They could just as easily refer to the one great sign of the one great and ultimate time. The one great sign would then refer to the Lord's resurrection, perception of which (and *when* it was perceived) would lead to either acceptance or

rejection at the ultimate “time” of the last day. This is how the Lord elsewhere uses the word *kairos* (“times”): “The time of harvest” (Mt. 13:30); “the time of the fruit” (Mt. 21:34); “you know not when *the time* is” (Mk. 13:33).

16:4 See commentary on 12:38,39,45.

An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and there shall be no sign given to it except the sign of Jonah- This sign is defined in 12:38,39 as his figurative death and resurrection, symbolic as it was of the Lord’s. But seeing the Lord only appeared to His followers, how was His resurrection such a compelling sign to the Jews? Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus was to give assurance “to all men” (Acts 17:31). But how? They hadn’t seen Him. There was no Euclidean reason for them to believe in His resurrection. How is it an assurance to all men and a sign to the Jews? Surely in that the disciples (and ourselves, in this age) are the risen Lord’s representatives “to all men”, and through us they see the evidence of Christ risen, and thereby have assurance of God’s plan for them. This explains how the wicked and adulterous generation to whom the Lord witnessed were given the sign of the prophet Jonah- that after three days, the Lord would re-appear. But that sign was only given to them through the preaching of the apostles- that generation didn’t see the risen Lord Himself. But the witness of the disciples was as good as- for in their witness, they represented the Lord.

And he left them and departed- The original words suggest that this is more than a mere notice of the Lord moving on. The Greek for "left" can imply a more conscious and formal abandoning (see examples in 19:5; Lk. 5:28; Acts 18:19). This would be in line with how in the similar incident in 12:38-45, the Lord had decided to 'leave' the masses of Israel and instead focus upon a minority. He 'left' the majority in the wilderness and went after the one lost sheep until He found it (Lk. 15:4 s.w.). In Matthew 12, the Lord made clear His change in policy- that He was leaving a wicked and adulterous generation and focusing upon the few who had truly responded, i.e. the group of disciples. But here He is again reasoning with the Jews and again formally leaving them. This is not inconsistency, but rather is such behaviour typical of the love that always hopes, that draws a line and yet revisits it in the hope that some will still change. Paul's behaviour to the Jews was the same- having turned away from them and towards the Gentiles, he still revisits the Jews in hope they will yet respond to Christ (Acts 13:46).

16:5 *When the disciples reached the other side*- The style of reporting this doesn't say 'When *they...*'. And yet presumably the Lord went with them. Hence the impression is given of a mental separation between the disciples and the Lord. This would have been all the more painful for Him

because He had just 'left' the Jewish masses to focus upon them (see on 16:4)- and even they were now somewhat 'off' with Him, and still caught up in hardness of heart, not perceiving the wonder and meaning of the feeding miracles (:9).

They had forgotten to bring any bread- This is the very same Greek phrase used about the Lord 'taking the bread' in the feeding miracles (Mt. 14:19; 15:36). The phrase occurs five times in the next verses (16:5-10- "loaves" is s.w. "bread"). The phrase is used a total of 23 times- here, about the taking of bread in the feeding miracles, and about 'taking bread' at the breaking of bread service. The only other use is directly in the context of the feeding miracles (see on 15:26). To 'take bread' therefore refers to an act of religious significance- for the 'taking of bread' in the feeding miracles was clearly invested with deeper meaning, as brought out in John 6. The disciples at this point seem to have sensed that there was something significant in 'taking bread'- but they had not figured out what. Because when the Lord warns them about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, they assume He is referring to their failure to 'take bread'. Their slowness to understand is really brought out in the record. The Lord had earlier used yeast as a symbol of influence and effect worked by teaching (13:33). But they didn't grasp that He meant 'beware of the influence and teaching of the Jewish leaders'- even though that had been such a major theme of His teaching from the beginning. Instead, they superstitiously felt that they must be at fault concerning 'bread' because the Lord had mentioned yeast, and so they concluded that the Lord considered their forgetting to 'take bread' as being somehow sinful. They were really so far off in understanding, and yet the Lord elsewhere speaks so positively about their understanding of His message.

16:6- see on Mt. 15:2.

And Jesus said to them- The disciples heard the Lord's warning about yeast, missed the danger of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and therefore wrongly assumed the Lord was saying something about the bread they had not taken.

Beware of the yeast- Their fear that they might have done something ritually wrong regarding bread was an outcome of their being influenced by the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their doctrines led to folk like the disciples becoming paranoid and self-suspicious over issues which were irrelevant, and indeed a distraction from the thrust of the Lord's teaching and intended way of life for His followers. The same effect can be observed in sincere believers who have fallen under the influence of Christian legalists.

Of the Pharisees and Sadducees- Here, yeast is used in a negative sense. The preaching of the Kingdom by us is also likened to yeast- a symbol for that which is unclean (Mk. 8:15; 1 Cor. 5:6-8). Perhaps the metaphor is

simply of ‘spreading’. Or maybe the Lord used this symbol to show that it is our witnessing as humans, as the sons of men, which is what will influence the ‘lump’ of humanity. People are increasingly acting like the personalities they feel they are expected to be, rather than *being* who they *are*.

16:7 *And they discussed this*- Every one of the 16 NT usages of *dialogizomai* (and they are all found in the Gospels) is in a negative context, of the reasoning of the flesh against the spirit, or of legalism against faith. The flesh prefers the way of internal debate rather than simple action in faith, because the longer we keep ourselves talking (as it were), the greater the chance we shall be finally disobedient. They "reasoned among themselves", and the Lord perceived that they so "reasoned" (:8). This double usage of the word is to be found in an earlier Gospel incident, where the Scribes "reasoned in their hearts", "among themselves", and the Lord likewise "perceived... that they so reasoned amongst themselves" (Mk. 2:6,8; Lk. 5:21,22). The point is that the disciples were acting like the Jewish religious leaders- which is precisely the context here, for in the preceding verse the Lord has warned them not to become mentally influenced by these people. This part of the Lord's ministry has rightly been described as His "crisis in Galilee"- the disciples present themselves here in the Gospel records as far from Him in understanding and spirit.

Among themselves- The impression is given of the disciples away from Jesus, huddled together keeping out of the Lord's earshot- and He perceives what they are whispering, and raises the issue with them (:8).

Saying: We did not bring any bread- See on :5 *take bread*.

16:8 *And Jesus, aware of it, said: O you of little faith!* - Note the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding. *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*. Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (Is. 43:10).

16:9 *Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered*- One gets a fraction of insight into the Lord’s struggle when we read that He perceived that the disciples were worried about bread; and He laments that they do

not perceive the miracle of the loaves which He had wrought (Mt. 16:9). His perception, His sensitivity, is contrasted with the lack of these things in His followers. He must have therefore been so humanly alone.

16:10 *Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many baskets you took up?*- It seems that in educating the twelve, the Lord designed the numbers of baskets they took up in order to be memorable by them. As they were immersed in all that broken bread, they were intended to perceive that bread was utterly no issue to the Lord. But they failed to learn that intended lesson, and the Lord was disappointed that the memory and intended lesson had not remained with them.

16:11 *How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees*- The disciples were rebuked as being "of little faith" in the matter of not *understanding* the Lord's teaching about leaven (Mt. 16:8-11). It has been commented that the sayings of Jesus "are everywhere too subtly penetrated with theological claims and dogmatical instruction for the distinction commonly drawn between Christian "ethics" and Christian "dogma" to be other than forced or artificial". His doctrines lead to His practice. Doctrine is likened by the Lord to yeast- it is going to affect the holder of it (Mt. 16:11,12).

16:12 *Then they understood*- On their own admission in the Gospel records, the understanding of the disciples was pitiful. Not only did they not really listen to the Lord's words, the words of the Only Begotten Son of God, but they retained many misconceptions from the world around them which did not accept Him. Thus they failed to see after two miracles relating to bread, that literal bread was not so significant to the Lord (Mk. 8:19-21). It's possible that "then they understood" doesn't necessarily mean that finally, they got what the Lord was on about. Because on another occasion He identifies "the leaven of the Pharisees" as "hypocrisy" (Lk. 12:1), rather than their teaching generally. So perhaps they still did not totally get the drift of the Lord's thinking.

That he told them not to be careful concerning the yeast in bread but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees- The Lord's teaching to the disciples about this came directly after He had told the Jews that they would be given no sign apart from that of Jonah. I have suggested above that He foretold that the Jews would fail to perceive the meaning of His resurrection; and He feared that the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees would lead the disciples likewise to not perceive this. We see here a classic example of where wrong teaching about apparently smaller issues can lead to.

16:13 *Now when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi*- Again we get the impression that the Lord was working to educate the disciples according to some kind of program. He surely would have loved to ask

them this question earlier, but He waited for some reason until they were in Caesarea Philippi. What that reason was isn't clear. Perhaps He wanted to wait until they were back in Jewish territory after their excursion into Gentile territory, the purpose of which had been to get away from the spotlight of publicity and teach the disciples. And like a good teacher, now the Lord tested their apprehension of His teaching.

He asked his disciples, saying- Erotao can mean to pray, to entreat, to ask for something- rather than to casually enquire about an opinion held. He asked the question seeking a positive answer; He was indirectly asking them to believe in Him as God's Son.

Whom do men say- This was to pave the way for His more significant, personal question: Whom do *you* say I am? (:15). "Say" translates *lego* which more specifically means to speak rather than 'to believe' or 'to understand'. He wanted to know the words of men's' actual lips about Him- which again hints that the disciples were not with the Lord all the time. They were often with people when the Lord wasn't present. Psychologically, considering others' views of Christ helps us better understand where we personally stand regarding Him- indeed, this is true generally in terms of self-understanding. Hence the Lord firstly asks whom others thought Him to be, rather than simply asking the disciples whether they believed in Him as the Son of God.

That the Son of Man is?- This is how the Lord saw Himself. Twice in Mark, Jesus is addressed as "Messiah" but He replies by calling Himself "the Son of man" (Mk. 8:29-31; 14:61,62). If this was His preferred self-perception, should it not be how we perceive Him? AV "That I the Son of Man am" is good translation but it remains an awkward phrase, until we perceive that the Lord is juxtaposing His humanity as "son of Man" and His Divine aspect, as the 'I am', the revelation of Yahweh in human flesh (see on :17 *Simon Barjona)*. Often we encounter this in the New Testament, especially in John's Gospel. The most highly exalted language about the Lord is to be found nearby to other statements of His absolute and total humanity. The Lord's words here lay the ground for His question to the disciples as to whom they thought Him to be. He has led up to that question by describing Himself as "the Son of Man". This was His preferred self-perception. Peter's response: "The Son of the living God" was therefore especially gratifying to the Lord, because Peter didn't merely repeat the Lord's own phrase "the Son of Man". Peter shows that he perceived the Divine side to Jesus, despite His evident humanity. Perhaps Peter was joining in the implied dialogue set up by the Lord juxtaposing His humanity ("son of Man") and Divine side ("I... am") in the phrase "I the Son of Man am". The Lord says that He is "Son of Man", and asks the disciples whom they think He is- and Peter gives the other side of the story, by saying that He is "Son of... God". Perhaps Peter was responding to the Lord's hint at this when He asks "Whom do you say

that *I am?*" (:15), for this could have been heard as an allusion to the Yahweh Name. We see this kind of dialogue ("banter" would not be too coarse a word) going on in the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4. And He seeks to lead us in such dialogue, speaking personally to us through His word and life experiences, as we respond in the words of prayer and life decisions made for and to Him.

Another possibility is to translate the phrase: “Who do men say that I am? The Son of man?”. This would be tantamount to asking the disciples whether people generally believed He was Messiah. As made clear at the end of chapter 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord knew full well that the majority did not accept Him as that, because they had effectively rejected John's message about Him. The crowds had simply liked his hard line about sin and his invitation to recognize human sinfulness. They had not gone further in accepting the solution he had proposed, which was acceptance of Jesus as Messiah. The Lord knew full well the answer to His question, but He wanted the disciples to consider it in order to elicit from them the recognition that John's ministry had not been accepted by Israel, and that their belief in Him as Messiah left them standing with their backs to the Jewish world. Compromise with that world, intellectual or social, was impossible.

16:14 *And they said: Some say John the Baptist*- Literally, *the* John the Baptist. "Some..." is simply translating *ho*, the definite article. "The John the Baptist" would therefore appear to be the main opinion- after that, some thought Jesus was Elijah, others thought He was another of the prophets. There was a strong belief in dead people reappearing in the form of others, *redivivus*, a kind of reincarnation. This had been Herod's view of Jesus, that He was the resurrected John the Baptist. None of the opinions they list include the possibility that Jesus was Messiah. The disciples' answer is therefore a tacit recognition of the failure of John's ministry. He was known even at that early stage as "John the Baptist" because his baptism of so many people was what he was noted for. But that baptism, that recognition of sin, had not led people to accept Jesus as the Christ. It happens so often, that we can have a temporary conviction of sin, and even do something about it- but to fully come to Christ is a different question, and it seems that few go on to make that vital connection.

Some Elijah- John's crisis of faith in prison involved him thinking that perhaps he had only been the herald of Elijah, rather than Messiah- and that therefore perhaps Jesus was the Elijah prophet. See on 11:3. And it seems some had accepted that view. This is the problem with crises of faith- others are affected by them and can easily share our opinion. In Jn. 6:14 we learn that after the miracle of feeding the 5000, the crowd thought that Jesus must be "that prophet which should come into the world". But by "that prophet" they likely referred to Elijah or a herald of

Elijah- and not Messiah.

And others Jeremiah- Why was Jeremiah a popular candidate? Was the persecution of Jeremiah by the Jerusalem leadership seen as a common theme with Jesus? Or the urgency of his appeals for repentance before the day of judgment came? Or the depth of his grief for Israel?

Or one of the prophets- Why so much misunderstanding? Perhaps because it demands far less faith to accept Jesus as a prophet, a holy man, than as being the unique Son of God, Saviour and Messiah; it demands far less response in practice. Islam presents Jesus as a "prophet", the new age religions as a "top bloke". But to accept Him as He is demands not only more faith, but also far more response in practice.

We can note that in 12:23 the crowd asks: "Is not this the Son of David?". That was a Messianic title. But the answer given here shows that this suspicion that Jesus might be Messiah was just a passing thing. The miracles themselves did not persuade the crowds of the Lord's Messiahship. Pentecostals should take note of that- miracles do not necessarily produce faith.

The false notion that the Lord Jesus literally pre-existed and was then somehow incarnated, or re-incarnated, was a pagan idea that had become popular in Judaism around the time of Christ. In fact the road to the Trinity began with Justin and other 'church fathers' coming to teach that Jesus personally pre-existed- even though they initially denied that He was God Himself. The Qumran sect, some of whose followers became the first Christians, believed that the "Teacher of Righteousness" pre-existed as the former prophets and would be an incarnation of them. This explains why they thought Messiah had previously been incarnated as Moses, Elijah and the prophets. In this lies the significance of the account in Mt. 16:14-18. Jesus enquires who the people think He is- and the disciples answer that the popular view is that Jesus of Nazareth is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets reincarnated. But this was exactly who first century Judaism thought Messiah would be. So the crowd view was indeed that Jesus was Messiah- but "Messiah" as they understood Messiah would be. The significance of the incident lies in Peter's affirmation that Jesus, whom he accepted as Messiah, was not a re-incarnation of a pre-existent prophet but was the begotten Son of God. Note in passing that the false doctrine of pre-existence is connected to the pagan myth of incarnation and re-incarnation. If, for example, Jesus really was existing in Old Testament times, then somehow He would have had to have been re-incarnated in Mary's womb.

16:15 *He said to them: But who do you say that I am?*- The effort required in interpreting Jesus is, it seems to me, designed by God, whose word it is which we are discussing. The intention is to make us think

about Jesus, struggle with the issue of His identity and nature, in order that we should understand Him better, and thereby love and serve Him the more intently. Perhaps that is why so little is recorded of Jesus- all the speeches and actions of Jesus found in the Gospels would've occupied only three weeks or so of real time. The rest of His life, words and actions we are left to imagine, given what we do know of Him. He wants us to reflect, as He did the disciples, "Whom do *you* think I am?" (Mk. 8:29). Perhaps that is why at least in Mark's Gospel there is the theme of Jesus not wanting men to be told in point blank terms that He was Messiah.

"Say", *lego*, means to talk out loud, and is the same word used in 16:13. The Lord may have been asking whom they talked about Him as. *Lego* means specifically to talk about; the Lord chose not to use words like 'understand' or 'believe'. Maybe He is alluding to His principle that words express inner thoughts and beliefs. And so instead of asking them whom they *believed* or *thought* Him to be (although that is the essence of His question), He asks them whom they talk about Him as. Because spoken words do ultimately reflect inner faith and understanding.

16:16 *And Simon Peter answered and said*- Peter is set up as our example and pattern. The records portray him in such a way that we see so clearly the similarities between him and us. The good intentions, the flashes of zeal, the miserable failures, the essential loyalty to the Man who was better than he. The Gospels also portray Peter as the representative of the group of disciples. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21). Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, sometime later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is truly the representative disciple.

You are the Christ- The confession of Messiahship and this incident of trying to stop the Lord dying are also juxtaposed in Mark's Gospel, which seems to be Mark's transcript of the Gospel account Peter usually preached [note, e.g., how Peter defines the termini of the Lord's life in

Acts 1:21,22; 10:36-42- just as Mark does in his gospel]. Surely Peter is saying that yes, he had grasped the theory that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah; but the import of Messiahship was totally lost upon him. For he had utterly failed to see the connection between Messianic kingship and suffering the death of the cross. He knew Jesus was Messiah, but strongly rejected the suggestion Messiah must suffer. And yet the Lord warmly and positively grasped hold of Peter's positive understanding, such as it was. The Lord's comment 'Get behind me' was exactly the same phrase He had earlier used to the 'satan' in the wilderness when the same temptation to take the Kingdom without the cross had been suggested. It could even be that Peter was the 'satan' of the wilderness conversations; or at least, in essence he was united with that satan. Hence the Lord told him that he was a satan. And interestingly, only Mark [aka Peter] describes the Lord as being tempted in the wilderness of *Satan* [rather than the *devil*]. And he records how *he* was a satan to the Lord later on. Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Matthew and Mark's records of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by them as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

Rarely in the Gospels does someone actually declare Jesus to be the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. This of course was the thrust of John's teaching, denying that he was the Christ but saying that he was heralding Him. Despite all the surface level response to John, with so many baptized that he was known as "the Baptist" very soon after His death (:14), it seems that only the disciples really grasped his essential message about Jesus. See on :14. Peter had made the same confession of faith in the same words ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") some time previously, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:69). It would seem that "the Christ, the Son of God" is therefore being presented as a formula for confession of faith. Martha likewise confesses faith in Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn. 11:27). The connection between the words "Christ" and "Son of God" is found elsewhere. Mark's Gospel is a proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1); Luke begins his Gospel predicting that Messiah would be "called... Son of God" (Lk. 1:32,35), not by being named "Son of God" by Mary (He was named 'Jesus'), but called on as Son of God by those believing in Him. Indeed it was the whole intention of John's Gospel to bring people to faith in "the Christ the Son of God" (Jn. 20:31). Therefore the Eunuch's confession

before baptism that he believed that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37) can be seen as a triumph of the Gospel- Philip likewise preached towards the same end as John did through his Gospel. Paul likewise preached the "Christ... is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). A 'Christ' was simply an 'anointed one', someone anointed or commissioned for a specific task- and there had been many people anointed in this way. The uniqueness about Jesus the Christ was that this Christ was the uniquely begotten Son of God. This explains why there is such a strong emphasis upon believing that Jesus was the Christ who was Son of God. And to this day, it is this uniqueness which differentiates the real Christ from a mere understanding that He was a good man who did indeed historically exist and die. The question is how much more, if anything, was required from people in terms of understanding before a person was considered to have believed 'in Christ'. The evidence of Acts and the Gospels would appear to indicate that 'belief in Christ' meant simply believing that He was Son of God and identifying with Him. The centurion (Mt. 27:54), healed persons (Mk. 3:11)

The Son of the living God- We naturally enquire as to the significance of "the *living* God". In Mt. 22:32 the Lord seems to connect this with resurrection; He says there that God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob because He will ultimately resurrect and immortalize them, seeing He is 'not the dead God but the living God' (Gk.; see Lk. 20:38). His 'living' becomes ours in that He will give us life; "living water" refers to water which gives life (Jn. 7:38), and "the living God" likewise (see another hint of resurrection by "the living God" in Rom. 9:26). "The living *bread*" meant 'the bread which gives life', and this is paralleled by the Lord with "the living *Father*" who also gives life (Jn. 6:51,57). Having taught that, Peter had gone on to state that Jesus was indeed "that Christ, the son of the living God" (Jn. 6:69). This would suggest to me that Peter perceived this connection with resurrection, and when here in Mt. 16:16 he uses the same phrase again, we may be justified in seeing within it an understanding of how the Lord would not only be resurrected but would be the source of life to others. The phrase "living God" was used in Judaism, e.g. the High Priest adjures the Lord Jesus "by the living God" (Mt. 26:63)- but more in the sense that the living God sees and knows all things. Again, we note that it was John the Baptist who preached (AV "bare record") that Jesus was the Son of God (Jn. 1:34). Yet after his death, it was only Peter, the disciples and a few others who accepted this- for :14 has made it clear that most people considered Jesus to be some reincarnation of a previous prophet, but not "Son of God". In commenting upon the end of Matthew 12 and the meaning of the parables about poor response to the word in Matthew 13, I suggested that the Lord recognized at that point that the Jews had been unresponsive to John apart from the circle of disciples- and He switched focus at that point onto them. See on 16:18 *gates of hell*.

Even before this the disciples on Galilee had confessed: "Of a truth thou art the Son of God!". Peter's confession was evidently of an altogether higher level. The titles we apply to God and Jesus come to have more meaning to us over time. But straight after his confession, he showed his complete misunderstanding of the Lord's death, and the whole message of following Him to that same end. He was rebuked: "Thou savourest not the things of God", straight after having been told that his understanding of Jesus' Sonship was given to him of God. If he savoured that knowledge, he would have understood the message of the cross which his Lord so insistently preached. But he wasn't yet at that level. He had to be told at the transfiguration: "This *is* my beloved Son… hear ye him" (Mt. 17:5). It was as if the Father was emphasizing the imperative which lay in the fact that Jesus really is Son of God: if that is truly comprehended, we must hear Him. The implication is surely that Peter had almost painlessly confessed the Divine Sonship of Jesus. Perhaps the Father had in mind the way Peter, for all his acceptance of that Sonship, would later forget the Son's words and mindlessly deny Him. Straight after this incident, Peter says that his Master pays taxes, as if this is something the Lord just had to do. But the Lord seems to rebuke Peter, by reminding him that if He is truly Son of God and Lord of all, then it is quite inappropriate for Him to have to pay such taxes; for the Father's children are free (Mt. 17:24-27). This evidence all indicates that there are different levels in knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is Son of God. 1 Jn. 5:13 says as much: those who believe on the name of the Son of God must come to believe (i.e. on a higher level) on the name of the Son of God. We must ask ourselves of our own degree of appreciation. For every member of the ecclesia is built up on the foundation of faith that Christ is the Son of God.

16:17- see on 13:11.
And Jesus answered and said to him: Blessed are you- The Lord is thrilled that although John's teaching about Him as Son of God had generally been ignored or rejected (see on :14), Peter had grasped it. He had earlier explained that although the preaching of the word by John had generally not brought forth a permanent response in Israel, the disciples were "blessed" because they *did* understand (13:16). The idea of being "blessed" with an understanding suggests that the understanding was a blessing given- see later in this verse on *not revealed*.

Simon Bar-Jonah- Simon, son of John. The Lord is contrasting Peter's natural origins, speaking of Peter's old name and his natural father, with Peter's high spiritual status as one of the few who perceived the Lord as being the Son of God. This juxtaposition of the natural and spiritual sides in a person is exactly what the Lord had just done with regards to Himself- see on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

For flesh and blood has not revealed it to you- The correct understanding

of the Lord was a "blessing", something given. Earlier the Lord had taught that the Father through Himself had chosen to "reveal" Himself [s.w.] to the spiritually immature disciples ("babes"), and not to the Jewish religious leaders who studied every letter of the Old Testament from dawn to dusk (Mt. 11:25,27). John's equivalent of this is his record of the Lord's comment that the Jews generally did not believe because Isaiah had prophesied that the "arm of the Lord" had to be "revealed" [s.w.] to people, and it was revealed only to a few (Jn. 12:37,38). And our spiritual birth is not of "flesh and blood" but by the sovereign will of God for us (Jn. 1:13). Paul surely has all this in mind when he writes that the things of God "are revealed unto us by His spirit" (1 Cor. 2:10 cp. Gal. 3:23; Phil. 3:15). Faith in Christ therefore requires 'revelation' from God. There was an element to which the disciples, and all of us who have truly responded to the word of Christ, have chosen to do that, and this is pleasing to the Lord. But if that was where the story ended, then salvation would be a matter of human works and intellectual tenacity and correctness in interpretation. Grace would be out of the equation, and God would face off against man over an open Bible which man must correctly interpret and live by if he is to be saved. The will of the Father for human salvation, and the depth of human moral and intellectual weakness, is such that this cannot be the way to salvation. Paul in Romans starts talking about predestination and election in the context of demonstrating that salvation is by grace, and therefore such metaprinciples exist- so that human works and correctness of understanding is only *part* of the final, invisible equation which finds its sum in human salvation. And so it has to be so that there is *some* element of God revealing Truth to us, blessing us with that revelation. Hence the Lord tells Peter that it is God's grace in revelation, His 'blessing', rather than "flesh and blood" which has revealed this to Peter. And yet the Lord says this against the backdrop of having spoken about the mixture of flesh and spirit in human salvation- see on *Simon Barjona* and on 16:13 *The Son of Man*.

But my Father who is in Heaven- Luke's equivalent seems to be that the Father which is in Heaven gives the Spirit to His children (Mt. 7:11 cp. Lk. 11:13). Again, the emphasis is on God's part- our part is to request and then to be receptive and responsive.

16:18 *And I also say to you*- The theme of :17 has been that human action, faith and response is only part of the overall picture of spiritual work and human salvation. The church is to be built- by Jesus- upon the rock of faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Again, the two aspects come together. Flesh and Spirit, Son of Man and Son of God, "flesh and blood" and Heaven.

The idea was perhaps that the Lord was going to build His church upon Peter and the confession of faith which Peter had made, but the Lord was

going to be the builder and not Peter. This would instil into Peter an appropriate humility for his later work of bringing thousands to Christ so publicly.

You are Peter- In response to Peter's 'You are the Christ'. We note here the mutuality the Lord was seeking to build up in His dialogues with His followers, and that sense of mutuality between us and our Lord can be felt today too.

And upon this rock- The term could refer to Peter personally, as his preaching was chronologically the basis upon which the church began. Perhaps the Lord held the shoulders of Jesus and spoke those words to the disciples- that upon the rock of Peter ["rock"], the future community was to be built. But the context is of declared faith in Him as God's Son. If this confession of faith (see on :16 *The Christ*) is the basis upon which the community was and is built, then we need to ask what else is really required as the basis for Christian faith. That confession is only a beginning- the Lord will build upon it. The Lord is surely alluding to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham was the rock upon which the community of Israel was to be built- and showing that each believer in Him as Son of God was no less than Abraham in the new Israel.

I will build- The idea of building upon a rock naturally recalls the Lord's parable of Mt. 7:24-26. As so often, the Lord told that parable to Himself as well as to us; He Himself built a house upon a rock, and He therefore knows how very slow the progress is. In that parable, the ability of the house to withstand the testing storm of judgment day depends upon the builder. We must take the step of faith, and yet the Lord builds upon that and our final passing through judgment day is partially dependent upon His building of us. And yet the metaphor of building is taken over by Paul as referring to the work that *we* do in building others up (Rom. 14:19; 15:2,20; 1 Cor. 14:4,17 Gk.). The clear implication is that our efforts for others are partially responsible for their entry into the Kingdom. I keep saying 'partially', because as we have seen throughout this chapter, the human factor works together with the Divine factor to achieve ultimate salvation for individuals. The Jewish religious leaders are likened to builders who built without a true foundation (Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11)- and so the Lord is saying that He has taken over that job, and the leaders of the ecclesia share with Him in doing it (the 'masterbuilders', 1 Cor. 3:10; 2 Cor. 10:8). But not only the leaders- for we each are to build each other up (Rom. 15:2; 1 Thess. 5:11 s.w.). And yet it was Peter himself who speaks of how we are "built up" by the Lord (1 Pet. 2:5)- it's just that in practice He works through others, so that the church in a sense builds itself up (Eph. 4:16).

My church- The first reference to *ekklesia* in the New Testament. The only other usage of the word in the Gospels is in Mt. 18:17, where the Lord

speaks of a process of telling a matter unto "the church" in the case of interpersonal disputes. The Lord implied, therefore, that He was confident that despite the failure of John's ministry, the minority who had responded and believed in Him as God's Son would provide the basis upon which He would successfully build a community of believers. Every reference to "the church" in the later New Testament needs to be understood in the context of how the *ekklesia* is first introduced in the Gospels. It is a community built by the Lord Jesus personally. The Septuagint had used *ekklesia* concerning the community of Israel; the Lord's talk of building another *ekklesia* based around faith in Him was radical stuff- for the obvious objection of Judaism would have been that the *ekklesia* already existed. The Lord's use of *ekklesia* in this sense was radical, and an effective rejection of the old Israel in order to build a new one- not on Abraham personally, but on faith in Him (which Abraham exemplified through his faith in the promised seed). The LXX of Gen. 28:3 speaks of an '*ekklesia'* (AV "multitude") of people' being created from Abraham's seed. And the Lord is now redefining this- as those whom He would build up into a new nation, based upon faith in His Divine Sonship.

And the Gates of the grave- An allusion to Rabbinic teaching that Abraham sat at the gates of hell to prevent the circumcised falling into it (mentioned by Edersheim in *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*). The Lord is saying that faith in Him is what shall save us rather than descent from Abraham. And yet the Old Testament speaks of the gates of death as being under God's control (Job 38:17; Is. 38:10), and He can "lift me up from the gates of death" (Ps. 9:13). The "gates of hell" can only not prevail against us through resurrection of the body. Peter's confession of faith was that Jesus was "Son of *the living* God", and I outlined the connections between "the living God" and the idea of resurrection under 16:16 *Son of the living God*. We should note that there were many wrong beliefs about "the gates of hell". The Lord doesn't specifically dismantle nor criticize them, just as He doesn't do so with the wrong idea of demon possession. Instead He places emphasis upon belief in Him and the hope of resurrection, which meant that death, and whatever "the gates of hell" were imagined to be- simply had no power over the believer in Him. His repeated 'casting out of demons' showed the same- however 'demons' were understood, the Lord's power was so great over them that they remained no credible worry for the believer in Him.

This may also be an allusion to a cavern in northern Palestine known as "the gates of hell". The Lord had just been in that area instructing the disciples- it's likely they had heard of it, or even made a tourist excursion to view it. The Lord is saying that even that much feared precipice, into which the locals threw sacrifices to ward off the powers of the underworld, had no power against faith in Him as the Son of God.

Shall not prevail against it- The only other time the word is used is in Lk.

23:23, speaking of how the voices of the Jews "prevailed" to get Christ crucified. He must have recalled His own words here, that the gates [or gatekeepers / rulers] of the grave would not ultimately prevail against Him.

16:19 *I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven*- The root word for 'key' means literally to close or shut. The Scribes "shut up" the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13 s.w.) - the job of Peter was to use the Gospel to open the way to salvation to ordinary people and those otherwise shut out by the Jewish leadership. The same word is found in Mt. 25:10 where the Lord speaks of how He will shut the door to the Kingdom at judgment day to those who didn't want to be there in this life (and again in the context of final condemnation in Rev. 20:3). The parable of Lk. 11:7 adds an interesting insight- even if in this life the door is shut [s.w.] to a person, if their way of life warrants condemnation, such is the Lord's grace that it can be opened in response to the intercession of others on behalf of that person. The key to entry or exclusion from the Kingdom was given to Peter in the sense that the Gospel of Jesus as Son of God could open the Kingdom to people, and if they hear that message and reject it, then the Kingdom is closed to them. It doesn't mean that Peter could just chose to condemn or save individuals. Rather does it show that the keys to eternity are in our hand, and we should therefore be devoting our lives to opening the doors for others to that eternal future. The keys of knowledge were given to Peter, and through his preaching they opened up the closed door of salvation to many who would not otherwise have entered (Mt. 16:19). Losing bonds is the language of bringing salvation and forgiveness (Is. 51:14; 58:6; Mt. 13:30; 18:27; 22:13; Lk. 13:16). And those keys are likewise in our hands too. If we introduce the Gospel of salvation to a man, the door is opened to him; if we don't, it remains closed for him. In this sense what we bind and loose is automatically confirmed by God, in that He has delegated to us the preaching of entrance into His Kingdom. Because the salvation of others is in our hands, both in and outside of the ecclesia, we are held responsible for their eternal loss if we do not minister to them. "Rescue those being led away to death [if we don't, then they will die]... if you say, "But we knew nothing about this", does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who guards *your* life [as you keep your brother's life] know it? Will he not repay each person according to what he has done? [at judgment day]" (Prov. 14:11,12 NIV).

Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven- The promise is repeated to all the disciple in 18:18, disproving Roman Catholic interpretations of Peter. There is here a continuation of the idea of the Gospel as being the keys to the Kingdom. "Whatever" could equally be translated "Whoever". The idea of binding is connected in the Lord's

thought with condemnation (s.w. Mt. 12:29; 13:30; 22:13 cp. Rev. 20:2). The idea isn't that Peter arbitrarily had the power to condemn someone, and have his decision confirmed by Heaven. Rather is this almost hyperbolic language an encouragement to us as to the eternal power of the Gospel we also preach. By men rejecting it, they are bound in condemnation; by accepting it, they are loosed. Their response to the Gospel we preach is to their condemnation or salvation, and what goes on here on earth is reflected in Heaven. We can think that if we offer the Gospel to a man and he shrugs and walks on in his life, somehow the passing of time after the encounter makes it less eternally meaningful. But not so. He encountered the offer of salvation from us, and the choice of rejecting or accepting it is reflected and noted in Heaven. This is the intense significance of our witness, the eternal moment of every encounter. Another time the words for binding and loosing occur together is in the account of the disciples being sent to loose a donkey that had been tied (Mk. 11:2-5). One wonders if the Lord intended them to perceive in that simple domestic task an acted parable of their possibilities- through unloosing that which had been bound, the way was enabled for the Lord to enter into Jerusalem. The hint might be that the witness of His people in the last days is what can enable His return and triumphant entry to Jerusalem. So very much has been delegated to us.

Binding and loosing were terms widely used amongst the Rabbis with respect to the force of their commandments and judgments having God's agreement (even in the NT record, 'binding' means 'to decree' in Mt. 23:4). They had the keys to the Kingdom (Mt. 23:13), and shut it up against men. Now, in the Lord's new Israel, Peter was to have that power. An uneducated fisherman was to have the place of the learned Scribes; it would have seemed so much more appropriate if Paul took this place. James and John were to be the "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), another Rabbinic phrase, used of the young trainee Rabbis who stood at the left and right of the Master of the Synagogue during the Sabbath services (hence the later appeal for confirmation as to whether they would *really* stand at the Master's right and left in His Kingdom). These uneducated men were to take the place of the learned Scribes whom they had always respected and lived in fear of... truly they were being pushed against the grain.

16:20 *Then he ordered the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ*- The Greek word is used five times in Mark, but never in the other Gospels. This has the ring of truth to it- a group of people observing one man would each be struck by different things He did, and their records would reflect that. And that's just what we see in the Gospels.

"Tell" translates *epo*, to say, and it has just been used in recording how

Peter *said* that Jesus was the Christ (:16). The Lord is progressing with the revised plan of operation which He began to make public at the end of chapter 12. He was effectively giving up on the masses, and instead focusing upon the disciples as the method through which He would after His death be able to appeal to the masses. In order to not be distracted, to spent time more intensely with them, He asks them not to fuel the kind of Messianic speculation which was then rife in Palestine.

"That he was the Christ" is AV "Jesus the Christ"- an unusual phrase. 'Jesus' was one of the most common names in Palestine at the time. The Lord's idea was perhaps that they were not to tell people that He, the man named with the common name 'Jesus', was in very truth the Christ. They were allow people to continue to merely see 'Jesus' rather than 'the Christ'. By the very silence of the disciples about what they firmly believed and so wanted to share, they would have been driven to discuss the Messiahship of Jesus *amongst themselves* and also to reflect personally within themselves about the Lord's Messiahship.

16:21 *From that time*- Again we see the Lord educating the disciples according to a timetable. Now He was satisfied that they were convinced of His Messiahship and Divine Sonship, He felt He could move on to teach them more about His death and resurrection. This is how we were likewise taught the components of the Gospel; but we should not think that the Lord's teaching process ends there for us. He is continuing to teach us, in accordance with how quickly we have grasped the preceding elements.

Jesus began- Matched by Peter 'beginning' to argue with the Lord (:22).

To explain to His disciples- Mk. 8:32 adds that "He spake that saying openly". But He has just given the impression in :20 that these things were private; He showed them "to His disciples". "Openly" in Mk. 8:32 is a poor translation; the word is elsewhere rendered 'boldly' or 'confidently'. The words He spoke about His forthcoming death and resurrection He spoke with a boldness of spirit that came only from total faith.

That- The sense of *hoti* in the context is definitely causative. The idea is that He showed them *why* these things must happen. He didn't just foretell the events of the passion, but explained why they must be.

He must- The usage of *dei* is so common in the Lord's discussion of His death.

Go to Jerusalem- Eis has more the sense of '*into* Jerusalem'. Perhaps He foretold the 'triumphal entry' and how so quickly, things would unlovely themselves. Such explanation was necessary, otherwise the euphoria of

the triumphal entry being dashed by what then happened would've been perhaps too hard for the disciples to cope with.

And suffer many things- The phrase is used elsewhere of the sick woman who had "suffered many things" at the hands of "many physicians" (Mk. 5:26), and yet is used elsewhere about the Lord's 'many' sufferings at the hands of the Jewish leaders (also in Mk. 9:12). Surely the Lord perceived in her someone who was sharing something of His final sufferings. All our sufferings are likewise part of His crucifixion sufferings, and if we suffer with Him, we shall also therefore experience His resurrection. That woman was therefore set up as an example of us all.

Mark and Luke (Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22) add here that the Lord added that He would be "rejected" by the Scribes, elders and Priests. The same word is used about the stone of Christ being "rejected" by themselves, the builders (Mt. 21:42). The word carries the sense of legally condemning. They rejected the sinless Son of God as a condemned sinner and demanded His death. If nothing else we learn some basic psychology- that when a person touches the conscience of less spiritual people, they are likely to intensely slander the person and effectively demand their death, which in our day may be the social death of rejection.

From the elders- Presbuteros is specifically used of the Sanhedrin members. The Lord's predictions here are highly specific and detailed.

And chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised- Literally, 'High Priests'. There was only supposed to be one High Priest, but the position was so lucrative and argued over that there were a group called the 'High Priests'- so far had Judaism fallen away from basic Biblical teachings, despite their zeal to keep the details.

16:22 *And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying: Be it far from you, Lord. This shall never happen to you!*
- Peter is quoting verbatim here from Is. 54:10, which speaks (in the Septuagint) of showing mercy to oneself. "Be it far" is Gk. 'Be merciful to yourself' (s.w. only Heb. 8:12 "merciful"). As an illiterate fisherman, he must have meditated and meditated upon the words he heard spoken to him in the synagogue readings. Let's be aware that in the preceding verse 21, Jesus had been explaining that passages like Is. 53 pointed forward to Christ's suffering and resurrection. Peter is responding by quoting a verse a little further on, in the same context. If Peter understood that Jesus was the Old Testament Messiah, he surely understood, in theory at least, that the Old Testament required a suffering Messiah. For him, of all men, to discourage Jesus from fulfilling this was serious indeed; hence Christ's stiff rebuke, likening him to the satan of His wilderness temptations, in that Peter too misquoted Scripture to provide an easy way out. If, as we

have discussed elsewhere, Mark is really Peter's Gospel, it is surely significant that Mark especially emphasizes how Peter especially didn't understand the need for Jesus to suffer crucifixion (Mk. 8:17-21,27-33; 9:6,32; 14:37). Showing the chinks in our own armour is surely the way to be a credible warrior for the Gospel.

Mark's record brings out the sustained mutuality between the Lord and Peter- for Peter rebukes the Lord, and then the Lord rebukes Peter (Mk. 8:32,33). About twenty times in the Gospels we read of the Lord rebuking or charging (s.w.); but whenever the disciples do it, they seem to rebuke the wrong person over the wrong issues. Again, the Gospel writers bring out the distance and mismatch between the disciples and their Lord.

"This shall not be" could suggest that Peter thought that by his own strength and use of force he could stop this happening. By saying this he not only over-estimated his own strength, but showed his naivety about the strength and nature of the opposition to the Lord. He likely still didn't appreciate how evil were the Jewish religious leaders.

16:23 *Turned and said*- The very same words are used in Lk. 22:61 where the Lord turns and *looks* upon Peter. The repetition of such visual images serves to teach how circumstances are repeated in human lives, each bearing the same Divine hallmark. The way the Lord "turned" and addressed people is recorded often in the Gospels, especially noticed by Luke (Lk. 7:9,44; 9:55; 10:23; 14:25; 22:61; 23:28; Jn. 1:38). Again this is exactly what we would expect from eyewitness testimony- a certain physical characteristic or aspect of body language noticed, remembered and reflected in a write up of those memories.

The Gospel records, Luke especially, often record how the Lord turned and spoke to His followers- as if He was in the habit of walking ahead of them, with them following (Lk. 7:9,44,55; 10:23; 14:25; 23:28; Mt. 9:22; Jn. 1:38). As we saw above, Peter thought that following the Lord was not so hard, because he was literally following Jesus around first century Israel, and identifying himself with His cause. But he simply failed to make the connection between following and cross carrying. And we too can agree to follow the Lord without realizing that it means laying down our lives. The Lord brought Peter to face this with a jolt in Mt. 16:22-25. Peter was following Jesus, after He had predicted His crucifixion (for Jesus "turned, and said unto Peter"). He thought he was following Jesus. But he was told: "Get thee *behind me*… if any man will come *after me* (s.w. 'behind me'), let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow me* (s.w.)". The italicized words are all the same in the original. Peter didn't want the Lord to die by crucifixion at Jerusalem, because he saw that as a follower of Jesus this required that he too must die a like death.

Peter needed to get behind Jesus in reality and really follow, in the sense of following to the cross, although he was there physically behind Jesus, physically following at that time. The Lord was saying: 'Don't think of trying to stop me dying. I will, of course. But concentrate instead on *really* getting behind me in the sense of carrying my cross'. John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. But Peter loved the Lord's words; but, as pointed out to him at the transfiguration, he didn't hear those words of Christ deeply. And so he missed the call to the cross. He had just stated that Jesus was Messiah; but soon afterwards he is recorded as saying that it was intrinsic within Jesus' Messiahship that He *mustn't* die or suffer.

To Peter- Mark says the Lord "rebuked" him (Mk. 8:33). But the very same Greek word has occurred just prior in the narrative, when Peter has just declared Jesus to be "the Christ of God". The Lord responded by commending Peter for his blessed insight, but the record continues: "And [Jesus] strictly charged them [s.w. "rebuked"] them, and commanded them to tell [i.e. preach to] no man that thing", and He goes on to underline to them how He must suffer on the cross (Lk. 9:21). Why did the Lord both commend and rebuke Peter for discerning that He was indeed the Christ of God? Surely because, in the context, Peter understood Messiah to be someone who would there and then bring salvation without the cross. Again we see how there was something in Peter as there is in us all which somehow revolted at the idea of real cross carrying. And it was for the same reason that the Lord "strictly charged" [s.w. rebuked] those who wanted to blaze around the news that He was Messiah- because they didn't perceive that the Messiah must first suffer and rise again before being declared in fullness "Lord and Christ".

Get behind Me, Satan- When He said He was going up to Jerusalem to die, Peter asked him not to. "Get behind me, Satan" was not the Lord wishing temptation to get behind him. He was telling Peter, whom He here calls 'Satan', to get behind Him and follow Him up there to Jerusalem, carrying His cross with Him (Mt. 16:23). Peter didn't want the Lord to go up there, to die like that, because he knew that this meant that he too must carry the cross. Here lies the reason for our recoiling at the cross. We realize that it implies all too much for us, if this is truly what the Lord went through.

"Get" is the same word translated "Get hence [Satan]" in Mt. 4:10. The temptation here was to take Peter's position and think that the Kingdom was possible without the death of the cross. And clearly the situation here is reminiscent of the wilderness temptation, which was in essence the same- to think of ways around the cross. And again, the Lord told the Satan to "get hence". In essence, this is the sum of all human temptation,

hence the Lord's very clear statement in the next two verses about the absolutely unavoidable necessity of the cross. The Lord was therefore speaking to Himself when He envisaged a person wishing to "save his life", to avoid death, yet wanting to "gain the whole world". This had been exactly the temptation of 4:8, to try to take "the whole world" without the death of the cross (:26). The command to 'get away behind' the Lord and follow Him is expanded upon in :24,25 to mean 'to follow to the cross'. But by the time of His death, the Lord knew that Peter just wasn't going to make it. For the Lord uses the same word translated "Get" here in Jn. 13:36 in telling Peter: "Where I am now *going* [s.w. "get"], you cannot follow Me [s.w. Mt. 16:24 "follow Me"] now". It seems it was the Lord's particular desire that Peter should die with Him on the cross - Peter's willingness to do this was therefore partly a desire to follow his Lord's intention for him, rather than the mere language of bravado. But finally He realized that Peter wasn't going to make it, at least not at that time: "But you shall follow Me eventually" (Jn. 13:36). We can usefully meditate upon the Lord's intentions for us, and at what times He intended us to rise up to them... and how even when we fail to mature as we should, He still holds out hope that we shall eventually get there. And this is to be reflected in our patience with our likewise developing brethren.

"Behind Me" is the same word translated "come after Me" in :24. This is a command to Peter to stop trying to dissuade Christ from the cross, but rather to get behind Him and carry that cross. Note how following behind the Lord and carrying His cross are identified in 10:38; Lk. 9:23; 14:27. Instead of just literally walking behind Him, the Lord is saying that real discipleship is to carry a cross behind Him.

You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man- The Greek *skandalon* literally means a trap or snare. But the Lord Jesus saw the snare and therefore didn't fall into it. Peter's attitude was a snare to the Lord in that it was attractive to Him- a savouring of the flesh rather than of Godly things was therefore attractive to the Lord. Some reflection on this will surely find in this a profound evidence of the Lord's utter humanity. For 'very God of very God' would no way have reasoned like this nor found the things of men an attraction over the things of God. Peter's fleshly thinking was a trap or snare to the Lord Jesus in that it was found superficially attractive by Him.

16:24 *Then said Jesus to his disciples: If anyone wants to be my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*- The disciples had a psychological barrier in understanding the teaching of the cross, just as we can likewise. Often when He spoke of the cross and His sacrifice, His followers either changed the subject or turned away. They were even against the idea of crucifixion (Mk. 8:32; 9:32-4; 10:35-40).

They failed to see the centrality of the cross. And these reactions can characterize our response to the cross, both in terms of turning away from considering its physicalities, and also in our own cross-carrying. And yet there is a sense of inevitability about the cross. We *must* face these things. Circle all the times in John 19 words like "therefore" occur (and cp. Acts 2:23). Consider how Luke records the indefatigable determination in the Lord's face during the final journey up to Jerusalem. There is the same inevitability about our cross carrying; even if we flunk it all the way through our lives, we eventually come to death. My name chiselled by some disinterested artist on a gravestone, with the radio playing in the background as he sits hunched up in his workshop.

Lk. 9:23 adds that the Lord asked us to take up our cross *daily*. Having spoken of the need to take up the cross daily, the Lord Jesus employed this form of logic to encourage people to really take on board what He was suggesting: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross... *for* whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, and the gospel's, the same shall find it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own life (AV "soul")? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:34-37). If we follow Christ, we must lose our natural life. If we don't, even if we gain the whole world, we will lose our natural life. *I must lose my life, one way or the other*. We need to go through life muttering that to ourselves. God asks our life, our all. If we hold it back in this life because we want to keep it for ourselves, He will take it anyway. The cross was a symbol of shame (Heb. 12:2 speaks of the shame of the cross). In this context verse 38 continues: "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed" at the day of judgment. We either go through the shame of carrying the cross now, especially in our personal witnessing to those around us; or we will suffer the eternal shame of rejection (Dan. 12:2); our shame will then be evident to all (Rev. 16:15).

Mark, who as we have suggested elsewhere was effectively Peter writing, records three instances of where the Lord’s prediction of the cross was met by the disciples’ misunderstanding, and His subsequent efforts to teach them the real meaning of discipleship, and the paradoxes which this involves:

	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
Geographical description	Mk. 8:27	Mk. 9:30	10:32
Note that the incident took place whilst they were on the road walking	8:27	9:31	10:33,34

Misunderstanding by the disciples	8:32,33	9:32	10:35-41
Jesus calls the disciples to Him, implying they were no longer following behind Him	8:34	9:35	10:42
Teaching about true cross-carrying discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45
Paradox	Save life / lose life	First / last	Great / least

The point is, that following Jesus in the way involves picking up and carrying His cross. But this repeatedly wasn't understood by the disciples, and they seem to have stopped walking behind Him as they should've done. Be aware that Mark is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel message; He's surely pointing out how terribly slow he had been himself to pick up the fact that walking behind Jesus is a call to carry a cross. And of course a glance back at our own discipleship and walk behind Jesus indicates just the same with us; and perhaps we should admit that more freely in our preaching, in order to like Peter make a stronger appeal for men to follow Jesus with no misunderstanding of what this involves.

Luke gives more detail about this saying about carrying the cross (Lk. 9:23-26). In the context of telling His followers to witness to Him, the Lord equates this with taking up their cross daily (Lk. 9:23,26). To not bear that cross is to deny the knowledge of Him before men. To live the crucifixion life is the essential witness. Every act of grace, every evident sign of self-control, every statement of forgiveness towards misunderstanding and unrepentant men... all this is showing something of the cross. And in this, painful and difficult as it is, demanding and driving-to-the-limit as it must be, lies the essence of our being the Lord's witnesses. To witness Christ is not to just painlessly distribute a few tracts. It is to live out the dying of the cross. Take up the cross, and follow me" is inviting us to carry Christ's cross with Him - He speaks of "the cross" rather than 'a cross'. The Greek translated "take up" is that translated 'to take away' in the context of Christ taking away our sins. Strong says that it implies "expiation" (of sins). This connection, between our taking away / up the cross, and Christ's taking away our sins, suggests that the efficacy of His cross for us depends upon our daily 'taking up the cross'. It is vital therefore that we "take up the cross" if our sins are to be taken away by Him. But our taking up of the cross is a response to the taking away / up of our sins. We all know from experience that how we start each day is important. Indeed, how we start any enterprise is crucial- hence the need for a sound understanding of the basic Gospel before we're baptized. We so often meet the phrase "rose early in the morning" in the Hebrew Bible. Strong defines the Hebrew *shawkam* translated "rose early" as essentially meaning "to

incline the shoulder to a burden... literally to load up on the back of man". In this we see an evident connection with the Lord's thought about taking up the cross *daily*, for that surely implies we are to take it up each morning (Lk. 9:23). Men and women had arisen each morning for 4000 years and inclined their shoulders to the burden of the day, loaded themselves with it onto their back. And the Lord now took humanity further, in redefining that "load", that burden, as His cross. Practically, does this not mean that we are to reflect as we come to consciousness each morning that we are to load ourselves with His cross? This thought need not necessarily lead to an image of having to burden ourselves with an impossible, awful weight. For again in allusion to this idea of loading oneself up each morning, the Lord spoke of how His burden is *light*! Here perhaps is one of the finest paradoxes of the spiritual life- that His cross, the life of self-sacrifice and self-giving unto the very end, is indeed heavy and demanding... yet in another sense it is "light", far lighter than the burdens of legalism which Pharisaic religion bound [and binds] upon people. Lk. 9:23,24 describes cross carrying as a rejection of saving *our* life, of making our present life as rich and fulfilled as possible; and instead concentrating on *giving up* our lives. William Barclay comments on this passage: "A man must spend his life, not hoard it... the Christian must realize that he is given life, not to keep it for himself, but to spend it for others; not to husband its flame, but to burn himself out for Christ and for men... the questions are not 'How much can I *get*?', but, 'How much can I *give*?'. Not 'What is the *safe* thing to do?', but 'What is the *right* thing to do?" (William Barclay, *The Gospel Of Luke (*Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 122). The threat of Lk. 9:23-25 rung in Paul's mind (in 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 7:9; Phil. 3:8): If a man gains the world for Christ but does not take up the cross, or is ashamed of Christ's words and principles in this world, he will be *cast away*. Especially does Paul allude to these words in 1 Cor. 9:27: "Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway". Paul recognized his temptation: to think that his zeal for preaching excused him from taking up the cross. In essence, we must all see our own likely temptations: to focus on one area of spirituality, with the hope that it will excuse us from the cross.

16:25 *For whoever would save his life*- The Lord is speaking also to Himself here- see on :23 *Get*. I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the process of our engagement with God's word, our love of it, our integrity in considering it etc., which is therefore more important to God than our grasping the final 'truth' of each clause in a final, Euclidean sense. By saying this I take nothing away from the fact that "the truth" is "in Jesus", that there is a wonderful personal reality of salvation for each of us in Christ, a living personal relationship with Him. My point is simply that God's intention in giving us His word is surely not to relay to us a heap of individual specific truths- for the written word isn't the best way to convey such things to simple, illiterate folk, nor indeed to computer-

assisted students of our own times. Rather does He seek us to enter into *relationship* with Him and His Son, and He uses His word and its ambiguities as a way of achieving this. The Lord Jesus used language like this- consider how He uses the word *psuche*, life, in Mk. 8:34-37. We are to lose our life in order to find life... and "what does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?" (NEB). The ambiguous usage of *psuche* is surely in order to get us thinking about our relationship with Him. And thus the Lord's parables often end with questions which have open-ended, ambiguous answers, through which we reveal and develop our relationship with Jesus- e.g. "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" (Mk. 12:9- kill them? be gracious to them? give them yet another chance? keep them as His people anyway?). I am not saying that correct interpretation of Scripture doesn't matter; rather am I saying that in *some* ways, in some places, in some aspects, interpreting the Lord's words is designed by Him to be open-ended rather than intended to lead us all to identical conclusions.

Shall lose it- Luke's record speaks of forfeiting life or self. Jesus speaks of how a person can lose their place in the Kingdom as a person losing or forfeiting their own self; He was thereby teaching that a place in the Kingdom was possessing one's own real self (Lk. 9:25 RV). To lose life is paralleled with the Lord to unashamedly witnessing to Him in an unbelieving world; and He calls us each one to lose our lives in this way (Mk. 8:35). Being ashamed of Christ's words doesn't just apply to not speaking up for the Truth when someone invites us to a topless bar after work. It's equally true, and the punishment for it just the same, in the context of not speaking out Christ's word in the ecclesia, to our very own brethren (Mk. 8:38 = 2 Tim. 1:8). The Lord Jesus will be ashamed of the rejected when He comes in the glory of the Father (Mk. 8:38). There is a telling juxtaposition of ideas here- shame and glory. Amidst the utter glory of the Father's throne, surrounded by Angels, the Lord will be sitting there with eyes downwards in shame as the rejected stand before Him and walk away. The Proverbs speak of how shame is to be the ultimate end of the wicked, and glory the end of the righteous. Yet it is *the rejected who* go away "into shame". *They* will be "ashamed before him at his coming". Yet the Lord will so feel for even the rejected, that He feels for them and reflects their feelings. This is no stern-faced judge chasing away those He is angry with. This is a window into the Lord's ineffable love and feelings even for those for whom it truly is too late, for whom the way to the tree of life is now barred. The way the Lord Jesus says that He will be "ashamed" of those He has to reject (Mk. 8:38) opens an interesting window into what it means to have Divine nature. It doesn't mean that we will not then know the range of emotions which we have as humans today- for we are made in God's image. To think of the Lord of Heaven and earth, on the throne of His glory, sitting or standing there

"ashamed"... because of His people. And shame is really a concept relevant to the presence of others- and the others who will be present will be the Angels and ourselves. Before us, we who are ourselves *so* weak and saved by His grace alone, He will feel shame because of those He has to reject. But there's another way of looking at the Lord's 'shame'. It is the rejected who will have shame in that day (Dan. 12:2). Such is the nature of the Lord's love and empathy that He will somehow feel their shame, feel embarrassed for them as it were. Which thought in itself should banish for ever any idea that we are coming before an angry Master. The Lord of grace is the One who will be, and is, our judge. And even in His condemnation of men, His essential love shines through. His condemnation of Israel involved them wandering for years in the wilderness; but during that wandering, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted" (Is. 63:9). God shared in their feelings and suffering of rejection; just as the Lord Jesus will share in the shame of those who walk away from Him at the last day in shame. God's being with Israel during their wilderness wanderings is cited in Am. 2:10 as an example of His especial love for His people.

The Lord had earlier taught in Mt. 10:28 that in the condemnation of the last day, it is God who will destroy [s.w. "lose"] life ["soul", s.w.]. But here the Lord says that a man will lose / destroy his own life if he is ashamed of His words and seeks to gain the world for himself in this life. The point is that ultimately the condemned will have condemned themselves; the process of losing / destroying life is initiated and performed by people in this life, and the final condemnation is simply giving them what they themselves wished for. And the Lord goes further to say that whoever 'finds his life' will lose or destroy it (Mt. 10:39). To find life for ourselves, to think that by obtaining ['finding'] the world, the ideal life for ourselves, is to actually lose or destroy life. But in Mt. 10:28,39 the Lord teaches that men cannot take that "life" from us- only God can, at the day of judgment. He clearly doesn't simply have mortal life in view, because this can be taken from us by men. Perhaps the idea is that for those written in the book of life, they 'have' eternal life, as John's Gospel makes clear. No man can take that from us. But if we spend our lives trying to find the ideal life for ourselves in this life (the coolest place to live, high income, fulfilling career etc.), we are in fact losing or destroying that eternal life, and therefore there is such a thing as names that were once written in the book of life being erased from it. In Luke's record, the Lord goes on to say that He had not come to destroy [s.w. 'lose'] men's lives, but to save (Lk. 9:56). It is men who destroy / lose their own lives, they condemn themselves, rather than the Lord seeking to condemn them. The Father likewise has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked. Rather does He simply confirm their own self-destruction. John's version of this saying about losing life is found in the context of the Lord speaking to Himself about the need to die on the

cross: “He that loves his life shall lose it” (Jn. 12:25). To avoid the cross is to love life- this fleeting life. Attitudes like ‘Spoil yourself!’, ‘You deserve it!’ and ‘Have a fun time- you only live life once’ are all examples of loving life rather than losing it in self-condemnation for the hope of the eternal life. Lk. 17:33 repeats the words, in the context of commenting upon Lot’s wife- her wistful look back to Sodom was because that was her life, the life she had loved.

The Greek text in Mt. 16:25,26 and Lk. 9:25 can bear a re-translation and re-punctuation which quite alters the sense as found in the English translations. It shows the Lord emphasizing the evident and compelling logic of losing our lives for His sake: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For how much a man is profited if he shall gain the whole world (in the Kingdom) and lose his own soul (now, as I asked you to do, to lose your soul for me)!... for the Son of man shall come... and then he shall reward every man according to his works", i.e. the losing of our soul is through our everyday works. Lk. 9:25 makes the same point: 'How is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world (the Kingdom) and lose himself (now)!: *or* - be cast away, be condemned at the judgment, because he tried to keep his soul, he didn't see the logic of all this!'. The point is, a man at the day of judgment will be willing to give up *everything*, even the whole world if he possesses it in order that he may find acceptance. But then it will be too late. *Now* is the time to resign all for the sake of that blessed acceptance.

I mentioned above that the Greek for ‘losing life’ has been used by the Lord in 10:28,29,39 to speak of losing or destroying life in the condemnation of the last day. Perhaps the idea is that we resign not only any attempt to materially turn this life into the eternal life, our small world into God’s Kingdom- but we also condemn ourselves now, so that we shall not be condemned in the last day. Flesh must be condemned, and it is our wisdom to do it now.

And whoever shall lose his life for my sake- Mk. 8:35 adds: "And the Gospel's". The Lord envisaged that the preaching of the Gospel could likely involve the loss of life. For many of us today, that is not the case; and in fact it has usually not been the case for the majority of Christ's followers over time. But the idea is that we are to sacrifice life for the Gospel; be it momentary embarrassment, social death, defriending on social networks or sacrifice of career and wealth. This is the large part which "the Gospel" was envisaged as playing in the life of a believer. Mk. 8:35-38 records the Lord’s teaching here slightly differently: “For whoever would save his life shall lose it, and whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, he shall save it! For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life? For whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my

words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed". The Lord Jesus paralleled "my sake and the gospel's" with "me and my words" (Mk. 8:35,38). He Himself thus understood the Gospel to be His words. Preaching, in whatever form, is not glamorous. It is a sacrifice of self, a not saying and doing as we feel, a surrendering of our own rights- for the sake of others' salvation, both in the preaching of the Gospel and in helping our brethren to salvation.

Shall find it- 10:39 has made it clear that if we find our lives we shall lose them. This finding of life likely refers, therefore, to finding it in the day of judgment. However, according to John's Gospel, the essence of the eternal life, the kind of life we can eternally live, can be lived right now in Christian experience today. So this is an element to which we who have forfeited having the Kingdom now, in all the apparent possibilities for self-fulfilment which there are today, can find the eternal life now in that we can live the Kingdom life today. Likewise if we take the Lord's yoke upon us, we shall "find rest unto [our] lives / souls" (Mt. 11:29 s.w.). And the implication is that that experience begins now, having shed the heavy burdens of guilt and legalism.

16:26 *For what shall a man be profited*- Mt. 16:26 records the Lord as teaching: "What *will it* [future] profit a man [i.e. at the future judgment], if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?". Mk. 8:36 has: "What *does it* [right now] profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?". Could it be that the Lord said both these things at the same time- to make His point, that the essence of judgment day is being decided right now by our decisions today? And the Lord's next words make the same point: "What shall [at judgment day] a man give in return for his life?" (Mt. 16:26) is matched by Mk. 8:37: "What can [right now] a man give in return for his life?". The question we will face at judgment day, the obvious issue between winning for a moment and losing eternally, or losing now and winning eternally… this is being worked out right now. The choice is ours, hour by hour, decision by decision.

The metaphor is clearly of trading: profiting, gaining, exchanging, losing. The parable of trading the talents uses the same metaphor. Mt. 25:17,20,22 speak of 'gaining' more talents- the same word used here about 'gaining' the world. And yet the intended paradox is that by losing materially, declining to profit and gain in the material things of this world, we shall gain eternal things. The idea of not being profited by gaining the things of this life is recorded in all the Synoptics (Mk. 8:36; Lk. 9:25). John's equivalent is to record the Lord's teaching that the flesh can "profit" (s.w.) nothing, whereas His words are spirit and life (Jn. 6:63). The spiritual life, lived in response to His word, is the true profit. There can be no ultimate profit in any fleshly, worldly enterprise.

If he shall gain- See on *profit*. We are to 'gain' more talents for the Lord, not the world for ourselves (Mt. 25:17,20,22 s.w.). We 'gain' our brother (Mt. 18:15)- not for ourselves, but for the Lord; Paul wanted to 'gain' men by all means for Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-22 s.w. four times). Unspiritual husbands are to be 'gained' by the spiritual efforts of believing wives (1 Pet. 3:1). The first century believers likely memorized the Gospels, and so Paul's repeated usage of the word 'gain' regarding gaining others would've been easily connected with the 'gaining' of talents in the parable, where the same word is also repeatedly used. Instead of gaining the world for ourselves, we are to gain people for Christ. Instead of careers and long hours at work to fund a cool lifestyle, we are to spend time visiting, phoning, writing, emailing, arranging things… for the gaining of individuals for Him. The contrast is between gaining *persons* for *Christ* and gaining *things* for *ourselves*. Paul had clearly meditated upon the Lord's teaching here because he says that whatever things were once "gain" for him [s.w.] he now counted as *loss*, and even saw his death, the loss of this present life, as "gain" (Phil. 3:7; 1:21). The "things" he no longer wished to "gain" refer to his life of legalistic obedience and condemnation of others (Phil. 3:4-6). The call to no longer gain but lose is not simply an invitation to unload our wealth in monetary terms. If it were, then it would only apply to the minority of believers over time who have been wealthy. More essentially, the call is to lose whatever human advantage we have had, even spiritual power and advantage over others, in order to align ourselves with the life and death of our Lord. Paul continues the allusion to this section by saying that he has counted all such human advantage as "loss" (Phil. 3:8)- the same word used in "lose his own soul / life"- in order that he might "gain" Christ. The gaining of life which the Lord spoke of is described by Paul as a gaining of Christ- for He is our life (Col. 3:4). Our existence is eternally intertwined with His.

The whole world- An allusion to the Lord's wilderness temptations. Yet again, He speaks largely to Himself in His teaching of others, as every true teacher does. The parallel records in Mark and Luke speak of suffering and loss in order to not be ashamed of the Lord's words and to preach those words. The work of witness is the 'gaining' of people for Him. It is not incidental, therefore, that the only other reference in Matthew to *holos kosmos*, "the whole world" is in the context of speaking of how the Gospel is to be preached to "the whole world" (Mt. 26:13). With this in mind, it may also be that the Lord is warning that a preacher may indeed gain the whole world for God in a spiritual sense- and yet be cast away himself. In this case, He was more than ever speaking to Himself, He who did die in order to gain the world. What we do for others is no replacement for personal spirituality. If this is a valid interpretation, perhaps subtly built in by the Lord into His appeal to not gain the material

world for ourselves, then we must re-examine the common assumption that a person must be good and spiritual because of all the good they have done for others. That good may indeed have been done, but is no guarantee of deeply personal integrity before God.

And forfeit his life- The allusion to Mt. 10:28,29 means that no man can take life from us, but God can, at the condemnation of the last day. Therefore the "life" in view is not simply mortal life, which can be taken from us by men. Rather does it refer to our eternal life, potentially given to us from the foundation of the world in Christ. We cannot give anything for that, it is priceless. We are to accept it, but if we accept it, then we will not seek to gain the world for ourselves in a material sense in this life. Note the emphasis upon his "own" life. The eternal life which we shall eternally experience is personal to each of us. The Bible teaches personal salvation. You, and me, as the sum total of all we have experienced, we as persons… shall personally be saved. The eternal life is not therefore merely a biophysical state which can no longer die; immortality is not merely the absence of death. It is more personal than that. It is about you and me personally existing for eternity; we ourselves as persons shall be saved and eternally continue. This of course highlights the eternal importance of character development in this life; for we shall eternally be who we develop into.

Or what shall a man give in exchange- The Lord is perhaps envisaging how some might think to offer their wealth in order to buy eternity at the last day- verse 27 goes on to speak of the day of judgment as if this is the scene which the Lord has had in view throughout this section. Surely nobody will actually do that- at that day. But effectively, that is how so many live today, thinking that their attempts to acquire this world can somehow be compared to the riches of eternity.

For his life- The Greek and Hebrew words translated "soul" ["life"] have a very wide range of meaning. The idea is usually of the person, the life, often the natural life. But here we have one of a few usages where the word is used about the person and their life in the sense of the person and life which they could eternally be in God's Kingdom. The use of "soul" here rather than "life" is perhaps because the Lord has been emphasizing personal salvation- see on *his own life*.

16:27 *For the Son of Man shall come*- There is a powerful practical result of the connection between the cross and the judgment. The Lord brings it out when He gives three reasons for denying ourselves and taking up the cross; the final and most compelling is "*For* (because) the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he give every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:24,27). Take up the

cross, do what is hard for you spiritually, because this is the basis upon which you will be judged- how far you took up the cross, really denied yourself. Before the cross of Christ, we know the way we ought to take. Before the judgment seat, we will know likewise. But we make the answer now.
Luke adds that the Lord will be "ashamed" of those who have been ashamed of Him in this life. If we are *now* ashamed of our Lord before men, we will be in the condemnation process (Lk. 9:26 cp. 1 Jn. 2:28).

In the glory of his Father with his angels- The intention of this phrase may be to demonstrate that the Lord will execute judgment with the full authority of the Father. Or perhaps the language is to remind us of the awesomeness of the day of judgment, and how inappropriate it would be to stand there and think that before the light of that moral and physical glory, with all the Angels present, we could suggest giving our wealth as an exchange for our soul.

And then shall he repay every man according to his deeds- The Greek refers to payment, and this is how the word is usually translated in the Gospels. And this is in keeping with the metaphor used here- of trading, gaining, losing and exchanging. The payment to us is for our loss of material advantage in this life; the attitudes which led to this are therefore the "works" which shall be paid back. It could be argued that the idea of paying a reward implies that the "every man" in view here refers to the group of faithful believers. For it is those accepted into the Kingdom who shall be given payment. In one sense, the penny a day refers to salvation, which all the same requires us to resign seeking the reward of this world. Or it could be that in another sense, the nature of eternity will indeed be according to the works we have done, in that one star differs from another in glory, and the servants were rewarded with different levels of reward according to their trading on their Master's behalf.

The 'deeds' of the context refer to taking up the cross, not wanting to gain the world for ourselves but seeking to gain men for Christ. These 'works' appear largely to be mental attitudes rather than deeds physically performed. The work of God is to believe in Christ (Jn. 6:29). The outcome of the day of judgment is according to human works in the sense that it is only a confirmation of the decision and judgment about ourselves which we ourselves have decided in this life- see on 16:25 *lose it*.

16:28 *Truly I say to you: There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom*- Mk. 9:1 records that He also said: "The Kingdom of God come with power". It is of course argued by many that the Gospel writers are merely summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. After extensive comparison of the Gospel records, I find this explanation unnecessary- because in no case of

apparent contradiction do I see that the different forms of words are mutually contradictory. The Lord could easily have said something like: 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)'. Luke's "Till they see the Kingdom of God" (Lk. 9:27) is perfectly in accordance with this- the first part of that clause ("Till they see") is from Matthew and "the Kingdom of God" is from Mark. It's statistically incredible that there is not a single case that I have come across in comparing the Gospels which is impossible to reconcile in this manner. If the Gospel writers were anything less than Divinely inspired, there would simply have to be contradiction between the accounts. I therefore see no need to assume that the writers were summarizing the Lord's words in their own words. This manner of repeating the same basic truth several times, e.g. 'Till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom (Mt.)- The Kingdom of God come with power (Mk.)', is true to my human experience in preaching the Gospel in public formats to illiterate people. I tend to repeat the same basic idea in slightly different words. And this is exactly what the Lord would've been doing, and the records of His words reflect that.

The preceding verse 27 has clearly used the language of Christ's coming and His Kingdom in the context of the final judgment, when payment will be made to those who have 'lost' in this life that they might gain eternally. It is of course no coincidence that the synoptics each go on to record the transfiguration. But the connection with verse 27 means that the Lord surely was referring to His actual return in glory and final judgment. The language of '*Some* here will not taste of death' is strange if the Lord has in mind an event which would occur within the next week. Surely He meant that that generation would see His coming in glory. The transfiguration was at best a vision or foretaste of that time, the evident "glory" involved with the situation is to be connected with the "glory" that will be revealed at the Lord's second coming (:27). I note under 17:1 that the Lord may not have been even expecting the transfiguration when He spoke these words in 16:28. What are we to make of this?

One suggestion is that just as it had been possible for Israel to have been prepared by John to accept Jesus as Christ and thus enabled the King of glory to come to Zion and establish His Kingdom, so it was possible that the Kingdom of God could have been established in that generation. But Israel crucified the Son rather than giving Him the fruit of the vineyard, and even afterwards they did not repent *en masse*, and those who did failed to take the Gospel to the Gentile world to the extent which was then required for the Kingdom to come. "*Shall not* taste of death" uses the same word as in 10:23: "You *shall not* have gone over the cities of Israel [in preaching the Gospel] before the Son of Man be come". But it seems that the disciples did not fulfil the preaching commission as intended, for the Lord's parables of harvest lament the paucity and weakness of the labourers, to the extent that the implication is that the

harvest was largely spoilt because of this.

Much hinges around how we understand *heos an*, translated "until". "Until" suggests that one state is ended after an event happens. Did the Lord mean 'You will not die until the Kingdom comes, and then you will die'?. That reflection alone suggests we need to think more carefully about the translation of those Greek words. Did the Lord really mean that they would not die until they saw the Kingdom come, and then they would? It could be that *heos an* is capable of a conditional meaning, as if to say 'Some of you will not taste of death *heos an* the coming of the Kingdom- i.e. you need not necessarily die, until the Kingdom come'. The problem with that is that every attested usage of *heos an* means 'until'; hyper examination of a common Greek term and trying to make it mean something else, or hoping such a meaning might be legitimate, is not the way to conduct Bible study.

Which leads me to my preferred suggestion- that the Lord indeed was saying that some of those present would indeed taste of death after they had seen His coming in glory. In this case, those referred to would be the rejected, those who had sought to gain the world for themselves in this life, rather than losing it all now in order to gain the future Kingdom at the day of His coming. The Lord often speaks of the awful position of the condemned in the last day. They will “see” Him- and *eido* refers more to understanding and recognition than to physical seeing- but all too late, for after that, they will then die the second death. According to Mt. 23:39, those who condemned Him to death would see Him again, and say "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord", they would accept Him as Messiah- but when? At His return, they as persons responsible to judgment will be resurrected and then in that day will wish to welcome Him as Messiah. But too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth at the last day- seeing His coming and Kingdom, recognizing Him as Lord, but then having to die. Rev. 1:7 speaks of this situation- those who pierced Him will see Him at His coming in glory and bitterly weep. So the Lord is foreseeing how some would indeed be resurrected to judgment, see His Kingdom come- and then have to die "the second death".

However, it seems another meaning is also loaded within the words. John's Gospel speaks of how only those who are born again can "see the Kingdom of God... see life" (Jn. 3:3,36). Later, John records how the Lord spoke of how those who keep His word shall never "see death... never taste of death" (Jn. 8:51,52). The idea would then be that some of them would come to find spiritual life, and see the essence of the Kingdom in their lives- and the following account of the transfiguration would then be proof that this was indeed achieved in embryo by at least three of them. In this case we could also understand "the Kingdom" as a reference to the King of the Kingdom, the 'royal splendour' referring to Christ personally- and the disciples saw this in the transfiguration. The connections with

John's Gospel are strong, but it would however seem strange for Matthew to start using language in such symbolic ways in the style of John. For this is generally not his style at all.

It is the "Son of man" who shall 'come'. The Lord will essentially be the same as the Gospels present Him when we see Him again. This is why Jesus even in His earthly life could be called "the Kingdom of God", so close was the link between the man who walked Palestine and the One who will come again in glory. “They see the Kingdom of God come” (Mk. 9:1) is paralleled by “They see the Son of man coming” (Mt. 16:28). Indeed it would seem that the references in the Synoptic Gospels to the ‘coming’ of the Kingdom are interpreted in the rest of the New Testament as referring to the personal ‘coming’ of the Lord Jesus (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 22:20). In that very context of referring to Himself as "the Kingdom of God", the Lord speaks of His return as 'the days of the Son of man'- the human Jesus. And yet He also speaks in that context of how after His death, men will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, i.e. how He had been in His mortal life (Lk. 17:20-26). As He was in His mortal days, so He will essentially be in the day of His final glory.

CHAPTER 17

17:1 *And after six days*- Lk. 9:28 speaks of "about an eight days after", reckoning inclusively and perhaps wishing to express the idea of 'About a week later'.

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother- Peter is mentioned first. An over-reaction against Catholic views of Peter can lead us to under-estimate the undoubted supremacy of Peter in the early ecclesia. He was in the inner three along with James and John, and in incidents involving them he is always mentioned first, as the leader (Mt. 17:1,2; 26:37; Mk. 5:37). He is the first to confess Jesus as Messiah (Mt. 16:13-17), the first apostle to see the risen Christ (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5), the first to preach to the Gentiles. Being given the keys of the Kingdom is language which would have been understood at the time as the Lord making Peter the Chief Rabbi of His new ecclesia. The Acts record without doubt gives primacy to Peter as the leader and chief representative of Christ's fledgling church. But, humanly speaking, he was the most unlikely choice. The one who in the eyes of the world and brotherhood should have sat a fair while on the back burner, done the honourable thing… in fact, many honourable things, in just keeping a respectful and bashful silence. And there is no lack of evidence that Peter himself would have preferred that. But no, he was commissioned by the Lord to specifically lead the church. The early church was to be built on the rock of Peter. Whether we like to read this as meaning the rock of Peter's confession that Christ was the Son of God, or as simply meaning Peter's work as the manifestation of Christ, *the* rock, the Acts record shows clearly that the early church was built upon the specific work of Peter.

And led them up a high mountain by themselves- Being led up [Gk.] a high mountain by the leader to be present at a theophany is very much the language of Moses taking Joshua and earlier another trio of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) with him part way up Mount Sinai, and likewise experiencing a shining face (Ex. 34:29-35) and God's voice from a cloud (Ex. 34:5). Moses returned from the Mount with shining face and the people were afraid- just as happened here (Mk. 9:6). Perhaps Peter vaguely comprehended all this when he wanted to build 'tabernacles', because this was the task given to Moses for Israel to complete. Lk. 9:32 speaks of the *exodus* which the Lord was to make at Jerusalem- a reference to His death. It was the Passover lamb which died at the Exodus- the implication is that now God's people were free to leave Egypt. Again, those secular fishermen were being shown (through the obvious parallel) that they were none less than Joshua in this new Israel which was being created; and after the Lord's departure, they were to take His place and lead God's Israel into the Kingdom.

The idea seems to be that just as He had taken the twelve into Gentile areas for a period of intense teaching of them, so even within the twelve He focused upon these three and wanted to spend time alone with them. He "took" them means to desire association with, to come close to. This was His intention, and one wonders whether the transfiguration was therefore unexpected for Him. Previously when He had tried to get the twelve away by themselves, there had been unexpected events which hampered that, such as the crowds following them, and even in Gentile areas the Lord seems to have been surprised by the faith and need to perform miracles which He encountered. In this case, it would be unintentional that the transfiguration is recorded as following straight after His words about His coming in His Kingdom; it wasn't as if the Lord said those words knowing that some would witness the transfiguration. According to Lk. 9:28, the Lord's intention was to go up the mountain "to pray", but whilst He prayed, the transfiguration occurred. See on 16:28.

Luke mentions that the Lord took Peter, James and John, started praying and then there was a theophany; but in their human weakness they missed much of it because they fell asleep. This was exactly the situation in the Garden of Gethsemane, with the same three involved; it was as if He was seeking to train them for it. They were "heavy" with sleep (Lk. 9:32), and the word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels to describe how the same three were "heavy" with sleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:43; Mk. 14:40). Even if Jesus Himself wasn't consciously doing this, we have here an example of how the Divine hand leads us through experiences in order to prepare us for others which are to come later in similar form.

17:2 *And he was transfigured before them*- Christ's transfiguration was a cameo of the change that should be apparent deep within us, for Paul says that *we* should likewise be transformed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), and he uses a related word in speaking of how Christ is to be "formed" within us (Gal. 4:19). *Metamorphoo* means a change of *morphe*; not necessarily of essential nature, because we too are to be transformed in this life, and have a new *morphe* develop in us (Gal. 4:19). But it could be that the 'other form' in which the Lord now appeared was in the form in which He will be in the Kingdom. The idea of a change of *morphe* of the Lord Jesus recurs only one other time- in the hymn concerning the Lord's death in Phil. 2:6,7 where we read that although Had the *morphe* of God, He went through a seven stage progressive humiliation until He took on the *morphe* of a slave in the final death of the cross. One purpose of the transfiguration was for Moses and Elijah (who had both had Divinely arranged deaths or departures from ministry) to encourage the Lord concerning His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31). And yet He appeared as He will in the Kingdom, with shining Kingdom glory. The suffering and the glory were thereby manifested to and upon Him at the very same time, to

show how inextricably linked they are. Perhaps too the point was being made that when He would hang there with the *morphe* of a dying and rejected slave, in Heaven's eyes, He was in Kingdom glory. John's equivalent of this is to record how the Lord spoke of His death as a 'lifting up', an idea which in Hebrew has connotations of 'glory'. The shame of the cross was only from the world's viewpoint, whereas from a spiritual viewpoint, His death was the very acme of spiritual glory. The blood drenched garment became in God's eyes a glistering white raiment (Lk. 9:29). This would explain why in one sense the transfiguration was a Kingdom vision, and yet it was also about the Lord's death. Peter later reflected that he could preach with conviction about the coming of Christ because he was present at the transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The Kingdom element of the experience cannot be divorced from the fact it was also an encouragement from Moses and Elijah concerning the cross. Note that John was also powerfully inspired by the transfiguration, opening his Gospel with an allusion to it in saying that "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). James likewise appears to reference the transfiguration when he writes of how the Lord's glory is so surpassing that there should be no jostling for human glory amongst us His people (James 2:1). The descriptions of the Lord Jesus are very similar to the language used about the scene at His resurrection- Angels in shining garments (28:3; Lk. 24:4), frightened and uncomprehending disciples (28:5). And yet the theme of the conversation was the Lord's death (Lk. 9:31)- but it took place with a preview of the resurrection scene.

And his face shone- The same word used about the shining associated with the Lord's second coming (Lk. 17:24). Having taught that we too should be transfigured (2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.), Paul goes on to say that God has "shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is transfiguration language. We are to be transformed into that same image. He there becomes the picture of what each of us in Him are evolving into.

As the sun- The Lord's return will be as the rising of the sun (Mal. 4:2). The same figure is used for the Kingdom age and His return in Mt. 13:46 and Rev. 1:16.

And his garments became white as the light- The same word used about the white clothing of the Angels at the resurrection ("white as snow", Mt. 28:3, just as in Mk. 9:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12). In the midst of the conversation about His upcoming death (Lk. 9:31), there was the encouragement of what the resurrection glory would be like. The same word is also used about the Lord's current appearance in Heavenly glory with clothes "as white as snow" (Rev. 1:14- the very phrased used in Mk. 9:3). Indeed, the description of the risen Lord in Rev. 1 has many

connections with the language used about His appearance at the transfiguration. Again the idea was to show Him how He would be after His glorification, to motivate Him to go through with the *exodus* at the cross which He must fulfil at Jerusalem. "As the light" is hard to understand, but the Codex Bezae reads "as the snow", in line with Mk. 9:3.

Mark adds that the Lord's clothing was "white as snow, such that no fuller on earth can white them" (Mk. 9:3). The Hebrew mind would have obviously thought of the clothing of God Himself, the "ancient of days" of Dan. 7:9, which is described likewise. The comment that no *man* could ever make them so white is also a hint in that direction. He was clothed with the clothing of God. This doesn't make Him God, for Revelation has many descriptions of the faithful having the same kind of clothing. Against this background, the promise of Is. 1:18 becomes the more awesome- that even although our sins are red as crimson, yet they can become white as snow. This can only be achieved by the wearing of God's own clothing, the gift of His imputed righteousness, which Paul extensively glories in throughout Romans 1-8. Rev. 7:14 speaks of plunging our robes in the blood of the lamb, and them becoming white. It's all so paradoxical- that this whiteness cannot be achieved by man, no fuller on earth could do this, but by plunging [surely an allusion to baptism] into the red blood of Christ. This is the challenge of faith- to believe that the promised whiteness can be achieved through Christ. It was possible even in Isaiah's time, on the basis that God looked ahead to the work of Christ which as it were enabled Him to do this. Therefore the reference to "no fuller on earth" suggests that there is a fuller in Heaven who can do this. And Mal. 3:2 is specific that the Messiah heralded by the Elijah prophet, John the Baptist, would be like "fuller's soap" in cleansing men through the judgment of their sins. David in the depth of his sin appealed to God to 'full' him ("wash me", but s.w. 'fuller'- Ps. 51:2,7); and this was done for him, on account of the future work of Christ which the Father then held in view. The Lord's glistering garments are therefore available for all of us. And it is with that connection that the scene there becomes no mere spectacle to behold in awe from afar, but a real picture of our own possibility before God.
Luke adds that the disciples "saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32). This is absolutely the language of Moses and the Old Testament heroes seeing Divine glory in theophanies, and like the disciples, hearing God's voice (Ex. 33:18 Heb. – "shew" is the same word translated 'to see'' Isaiah- Jn. 12:41; Ezekiel- Ez. 1:28). Yet again the Lord was seeking to show those secular men that they were called to work on the level of Moses and the prophets in the new Israel which the Lord Jesus was creating out of manual labourers, prostitutes, tax collectors, swindlers and sinners. See on :5 *cloud*.

17:3 *And there appeared before them*- See on :9 *the vision*.

Moses and Elijah- They appeared "in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as the Lord did- this is clearly a vision of the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus was the firstfruits from the dead, who opened the way to immortality. So there is no way that they were already glorified before His death and resurrection. It was a vision (:9), of the Kingdom. Just as Jesus was not then glorified Himself at that time, neither were they. They spoke of how the Lord was going to "fulfil" the *exodus* in His death at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:31). It was Moses who could supremely explain this to the Lord, having himself slain the Passover lamb and experienced the *exodus* made possible thereby.

Talking with Jesus- The transfiguration follows straight on from the Lord's talk about the Kingdom at the end of chapter 16. It was a foretaste of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom is fundamentally a *relationship* with God. Thus the foretaste of the Kingdom presented at the transfiguration was of faithful men in spiritual conversation with the glorified Lord Jesus, with His face shining as the sun as it will in the Kingdom, as the "sun of righteousness" (Mal. 4:2).

Luke adds that the disciples' eyes were heavy and they fell asleep at the critical moment. But earlier, "having remained awake", the same disciples were blessed with a vision of the Lord's glory (Lk. 9:32 RVmg.). If they had remained awake in the garden, they would have seen the Lord being glorified by Angelic visitation. But they didn't perceive how the circumstances were repeating, and thus didn't find the strength and inspiration which was potentially prepared for them through the similarity of circumstance.

17:4 *And Peter said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here. If it pleases you*- Throughout the Lord's ministry, Peter had a mental barrier to the idea of his Lord suffering and dying. It could be argued that his desire to build tents and remain in the mountain of transfiguration was rooted in this- Moses and Elijah had just spoken with the Lord Jesus about the path He must take to death (Lk. 9:31), and Peter somehow wants the Lord to stay there in the mountain (Mk. 9:5). And yet Peter's later preaching has so much to say about the Lord's death. And his letters contain quotations and allusions from Isaiah's suffering servant prophecies (1 Pet. 2:21 etc.). Further, if we accept the idea elsewhere discussed that Mark's Gospel is a transcript of Peter's preaching of the Gospel, it becomes significant that Mark's version of the Gospel likewise emphasizes Jesus as the suffering servant. Thus what Peter was once blind to, he made a special point of preaching. The content of his witness reflected his deep awareness of his past blindness- and therefore his appeal to others to 'get it' was the more powerful seeing that he himself

had patently 'not got it' for some years. And it shouldn't be hard to translate his example into our daily experience, speaking of our weaknesses and former blindnesses rather than coming over as the self-congratulatory religious guy.

It is also possible to understand Peter's suggestion simply as the kind of inappropriate thing a man would say who wants to make a response to spirituality, but doesn't know how to. He wanted to do something material and physical- he simply didn't know what to say (Mk. 9:6). The response was the voice from Heaven telling Peter to *hear* Jesus, to respond to His word, rather than run around doing inappropriate works just because we feel we have to *do* something.

I will make here three tabernacles- one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah- See on 17:1. It may have taken much of the day to climb the mountain, and Peter was maybe thinking of where they were going to sleep for the night. Or was did he also have in mind a celebration of the feast of Tabernacles at that time? Later, Peter came to see his death as a taking down of a tent (2 Pet. 1:13), using the same word for the tabernacle he had wanted to build for his Lord at the transfiguration. Then, he had wanted the tent to be set up so that the time of the Lord's departure wouldn't come; so that the Lord would stay with them there, with Moses and Elijah, in what must have seemed like the Kingdom of God. Again, Peter didn't want the cross, neither for his Lord nor for himself. But by the time he wrote 2 Peter, he had learnt his lesson; he saw that his tent must be taken down. The vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus, the words of His coming death and future Kingdom, these were quite enough. There had been no need of the tent on the mountain, and now he saw there was no need for the tent of his body either. We are all the same. Our death will literally be a death with the Lord, in that our resurrection will be after the pattern of His (Rom. 6:5). Peter learnt this lesson from the transfiguration because he describes his coming death as his *exodus* (2 Pet. 1:15), just as Moses and Elijah had spoken then of the Lord's coming death (Lk. 9:31).

17:5- see on 16:16.
While he was yet speaking, a bright cloud- Moses had previously entered the cloud of glory, seen God's glory and heard God's voice- on the top of a mountain. Moses' ascent into the mountain and into the very cloud of Divine glory was understood in Judaism as the very zenith of human spiritual achievement of all time, coming so close to the very personal presence of God, never to be repeated amongst men. And now, three fishermen were having the very same experience. No wonder they feared as they themselves entered into that cloud (Lk. 9:34).

Overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, saying: This is

My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased- This was literally the word of God, and yet it was actually a string of three quotations from God's word in the Old Testament: "You are My Son" (Ps. 2:7), "In whom My soul delights" (Is. 42:1), "Hear Him" (Dt. 18:15). It must have been a profound evidence of the Bible's Divine inspiration. The very voice of God repeating His own words as found in the Law, Psalms and Prophets- the three divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Hear Him- This was intended to take the mind back to Dt. 18:15, where it was written that Messiah would be 'heard' by the faithful. But Peter fell down paralyzed with fear; he didn't really hear the son of God then. Yet in Acts 3:22, Peter quotes Dt. 18:15 and asks his hearers to obey the passage by hearing Jesus, through his preaching of Him. He was asking his audience to do what he himself hadn't done.

17:6 *And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face and were terrified*- The strong similarity with Moses (see on :5 *cloud*) was such that they felt utterly unworthy, which is what falling on the face is commonly associated with in the Old Testament (Abraham, Gen. 17:3; Joseph's brothers, Gen. 50:18; Moses, Num. 16:4; Balaam, Num. 22:31; Joshua, Josh. 7:6; Ruth, Ruth 2:10; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 2:46). Their fear is similar to Israel's when confronted with the sight of a similar theophany on a mountain. They felt, as we all do at times, that all this was beyond them. The Lord's comfort of them was not simply reassuring them that they were not going to be consumed by the vision, but more so encouraging them that they really could rise up to the height of the calling to be as Moses. Paul grasped the point when he invites us *each one* to see ourselves as Moses, beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ, "we each with unveiled face" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). Each of us are as Moses, not just the church leadership, but each one of us who has entered a personal relationship with Christ and seen God's glory in His face.

17:7 *And Jesus came and touched them, and said: Arise and be not afraid*- This is intentionally similar to the experience of Daniel in Dan. 10, with the Lord Jesus lifting up the disciples, who were feeling unworthy as Daniel did. Again, the disciples were being taught that in the new Israel, there are no heroes set in stained glass that are high above our possible reach. We are the heroes. Just as Daniel felt unworthy, so did the disciples- the connection made the point that the heroes of Judaism were also weak and felt their sinfulness, and on this basis the disciples were encouraged to be like them and rise up to their spirit.

Their fear was not simply of the majesty of the moment, but more fundamentally their fear of being called to be as Moses- see on :6. A massive 23 times we find the Greek phrase translated "Fear not" on the lips of the Lord Jesus. His consistent, persistent reassurance of His

faltering followers, whose fear is often because of their own moral inadequacy, is significant indeed.

17:8 *And lifting up their eyes, they saw*- 'Lifted up', *epairo*, is surely intended to resonate with *egeiro* ["arise" / 'get up'] of :7. The picture is given of the Lord bending down and touching them, as if they are children, and urging them to rise up. Instead, they just raise up their eyes, and see only Jesus. We really are invited to play 'Bible television' here. The scene is so imaginable. And again, the Gospel writers and speakers were emphasizing the weakness of even the three leading disciples. Peter spoke inappropriately, offering to make booths when instead God wanted him to 'hear' His Son; their fear is likened to the fear of unspiritual Israel at the theophany on Sinai; they are scared to get up in obedience to Jesus' touch, raising their large childlike eyes to Him instead… Indeed the record of the transfiguration really stresses the disciples' weakness, exhibited in the face of the Kingdom glory of their Lord and the earnest encouragement of Him by more spiritual men to go through with the cross- whilst they slept.

No one, save Jesus only- In the Greek as well as in translation, this is really labouring the point. The "save / only", *monos*, is redundant- they saw 'nobody except Jesus' is a statement which needs no further qualification, indeed grammatically it almost *cannot* be given further qualification, and reads awkwardly because of the *monos*, "only", that is added. But the word "only" is added to emphasize that their focus was solely upon Him. That was the purpose of the event, and it had been achieved. Christ centeredness is the ultimate, final and total issue of our experience of Him, the Law and the prophets. The transfiguration ends with this total focus *monos* upon Christ; this was the practical effect of the theophany. John's Gospel doesn't record the transfiguration, but as so often, it is indeed alluded to. For John's Gospel is full of references to seeing glory, to hearing the Son. It's as if John presents Jesus to us a constant theophany, not one that three of the best disciples go up a mountain to see for a short period, but one which is continually before each of us, and which according to Paul's allusions to it, draws us into its very process. For we too are transfigured as we like the disciples behold the Lord's transfiguration (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18 s.w.).

17:9 *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying: Tell the vision to no one, until the Son of Man be risen from the dead*- Whilst this literally means 'the thing seen', the transfiguration was indeed a vision. Seeing that Christ is the firstfruits from the dead and that there is no conscious survival of death, it follows that at best Moses and Elijah were resurrected especially for the occasion. But they "appeared in glory" (Lk. 9:31), as if they were in the Kingdom. The Greek translated "appeared" has the strong sense of 'being seen / observed'. This is how they were seen- another hint at a vision. When the event

finished, Lk. 9:36 says that Jesus was "found alone"- but that is a poor translation of *heurisko*. He was seen, perceived alone- again hinting that the entire experience was a vision rather than occurring in reality. The way that "Suddenly, when they had looked round about" they saw only Jesus, finding Moses and Elijah had disappeared (Mk. 9:8) would also hint at a visionary experience. Note that there is no suggestion that Moses and Elijah went off anywhere, let alone 'returned' to Heaven. The vision of them simply abruptly ended. They saw nobody "except Jesus only with themselves" or "they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus" (Mk. 9:8) would suggest that they were as it were looking at themselves from outside of themselves- again, ideas appropriate to a visionary experience rather than an actual personal encounter. And this is how the incident with Moses and Elijah began, for "there *appeared unto them* Moses and Elijah talking with Him" (:3). It was an appearance *unto them*, a vision which ended when they saw themselves from outside themselves and realized they were actually alone with Jesus. The language of 'appearance' used throughout the records of the transfiguration would also suggest that the incident with Moses and Elijah was an appearance *to them*, in their eyes and perception, rather than necessarily in reality.

"To no one" maybe connects with the fact that they saw "no man" except Jesus (:8); and so they are asked to tell the vision to "no man" until after the Lord's resurrection. It could be that the Lord wanted them to retain their focus upon Him by not telling others but instead meditating personally upon what they had seen. The vision had been of the Lord's resurrection glory- we noted above the similarities in language to the shining garments of the Angels at the resurrection scene. The Lord didn't want people to think that He had already attained that glory without the cross. Even though in prospect He had that glory, He was insistent that no impression be given that He could attain it without passing through the cross. This was particularly important for Peter to appreciate, who several times entertained a hope that glory was possible for the Lord without the cross.

The Synoptics each record the transfiguration. But did John? He saw it, and here he was commanded to tell it to others after the resurrection. It would be almost impossible for his Gospel record to not mention it. I have suggested that he actually begins his Gospel with the recollection of how he had seen the Lord's glory at the transfiguration (Jn. 1:14 "we beheld His glory"), and that the whole Gospel presents Jesus in "glory" and being "beheld" or 'seen' in that glory.

Mark adds (Mk. 9:10) that "they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean". This comment indicates how secular they were; for the idea of bodily resurrection was well known within Judaism- the Pharisees believed that the dead would rise, although the Sadducees denied it. But the

disciples were clearly unfamiliar with the idea, because they simply hadn't been seriously religious people. The word for 'questioning' is used 10 times in the NT and always in a negative sense, mainly of the unbelieving Jews questioning the things of Christ. Thus it is used twice later in Mk. 9 (Mk. 9:14,16) about the Jews questioning about Jesus. Such questioning is so often an excuse for lack of faith, pressing for over-definition of everything as an excuse for disbelief. Instead of focusing on the glory of Jesus, they got distracted (wilfully) by semantics, words and meanings.

17:10 *And his disciples asked him: Why do the scribes say*- The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes…?", they reasoned, implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46; He had to specifically tell them not to address the Rabbis as 'father' (Mt. 23:8,9), implying they had too much respect for them. The way the disciples speak of the Scribes as if they have such a valid theological position reflects their upbringing and respect for the ruling elite of the synagogue (Mt. 17:10), with whom the Lord was at such total variance. They were concerned that the Pharisees had been offended by the Lord's words (Mt. 15:12). We again see here how the disciples were out of step with the Lord's thinking, pursuing their own mental agenda, and not doing that they had just been told- to 'hear Him'. For the Lord has just told them very seriously ("charged them") to not say anything about this experience until He was resurrected. But instead they are grappling with another issue- if this Jesus was really Messiah, well why hadn't Elijah come first, as the Scribes taught? Clearly we see them pursuing a line of thought which precluded their attention to what the Lord was so earnestly seeking to tell them.

That Elijah must first come- This provides another insight into the shallowness of their understanding. The transfiguration had persuaded them, at least for the moment, that Jesus was Messiah. But they were confused as to why the Elijah prophet hadn't come first. John the Baptist, whom they had followed and believed, had clearly cast himself in the role of Elijah. But it seems that they hadn't really grasped the significance of John's ministry at all.

17:11 *And he answered and said: Elijah indeed comes*- There can be no doubt that 'Elijah' will come in some form: "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the *coming* of the great and dreadful day of the Lord... lest I *come* and smite the earth" (Malachi 4:5,6). The coming of the Lord must therefore be preceded by Elijah's work. His mission will be to direct Israel's attention to God's Word, "lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:4,6). This was evidently not totally fulfilled by John the Baptist, seeing that the land was smitten after A.D. 70 due to Israel's

failure to repent. "Lest I come..." is clearly referring to God's manifestation in Christ's second coming - it is associated with the arising of "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2,6). Whilst John fulfilled the role of the Elijah prophet to those who truly repented (Mt. 11:14), he emphatically denied that he was 'Elijah' (John 1:21,23). This can only mean that the Elijah prophet is yet to come. Our Lord silences all doubt about this: "Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things" (Mt. 17:11). Elijah's work will be to turn the hearts of Israel back to the patriarchs in repentance (Malachi 4:6 cp. 1 Kings 18:37), so that Christ comes to an Israel who have turned away from unGodliness (Is. 59:20). John being a mini-Elijah prophet, it is to be expected that the broad features of his ministry will be repeated in the work of the final Elijah prophet. John was called "the Baptist", so evident was his emphasis on water baptism. Indeed, the name 'John' and the image of water baptism are hard to separate. There is fair reason to think that 'Elijah' will also literally baptize. "That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn.1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias" (Jn. 1:25).

And shall restore all things- The restoration of the Kingdom is ultimately Messiah's work (Acts 1:9-11). The restoring referred to here would therefore mean spiritual restoration. Mark's account of John's activities clearly alludes to the Malachi passages about the Elijah prophet, and the descriptions of Elijah's clothing, appearance and diet are clearly intended to help us identify him with a prophet like Elijah. The LXX in Mal. 4:5 speaks of how the prophet will *restore* the hearts of the fathers to the children. This confirms that the restoration to be achieved by the Elijah prophet is largely spiritual, psychological and internal. The more physical restoration of the Kingdom on earth is Messiah's work. But the Lord is placing Elijah's work in the future- because Israel had failed to respond to it. And yet what are we to make of the repeated descriptions in the Gospels of "all" Israel going out to John and repenting? My suggestion is that they were eager for a Messiah to come and save them from the Romans; John appeared looking like and alluding to Elijah, and so they were eager to accept him as an Elijah prophet, knowing that this heralded Messiah. They 'repented' because there was a clear connection made in Judaism between Jewish repentance, and the Elijah prophet and Messiah's coming. Thus: "Israel will fulfil the great repentance when the Elijah of blessed memory comes" (Pirqe R. Eliezer 43 [25a]); and many other examples are quoted by Walter Wink (Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: C.U.P. 2006) p. 3). The Qumran documents even claim that the faithful would go out into the wilderness to the Elijah prophet and separate themselves from the unholy in Israel (1 QS 8:12-16) (More examples are given in Carl Kazmierski, *John the*

Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999) p. 26). Hence the intended sarcasm of the idea that in fact "all" Israel went out to the wilderness to John! Therefore their repentance was as it were self-induced and merely symbolic, because they believed it was part of a sequence of events which would lead to Messiah's coming and liberation from Rome. This would be a classic example of surface level spirituality and response to God's word, when in fact the response was motivated by selfish and unspiritual motives. No wonder John appealed to them to *really* repent. The Lord says that Elijah comes "first", *proton*, above all, most importantly, to achieve this restoration- the implication being that the fact John's ministry had failed to bring "all" Israel to this position, meant that there must therefore be another Elijah ministry which would succeed before Messiah could come in glory. And this would indeed "restore" the *hearts* of Israel, as Mal. 4:5 LXX requires.

17:12 *But I say unto you, that Elijah came already and they knew him not, but did to him*- Christ accused the Jews of rejecting John the Baptist (Mt. 17:12; Lk. 7:32–35), and on other occasions He commented on the fact that they had accepted his teaching, with the result that spiritually their house was swept and garnished (Mt. 12:44; Jn. 5:35). We can conclude from this that their *appearance* of accepting John's message was spoken of by Jesus as if they had accepted it. Likewise Christ called the Jews both children of hell (Mt. 23:15) and children of the Kingdom (Mt. 8:12); the latter was how they perceived themselves. The things "done" to John surely include his death for the Lord goes on to say that He will "likewise suffer of them", "of this generation" (Lk. 17:25). But it was the despised Herod who had John murdered. And yet Jesus here says that that generation had done that to John- despite the fact that he remained, it seems, immensely popular amongst that generation. Again the Lord is stressing that all the apparent response to John had not been sincere- the Jews who had seemingly responded to him were in fact as bad as apostate Herod and it was effectively *they* who had killed him. Naturally such language begged the response that no, it was Herod and his courtiers who killed John, not the mass of people. But the Lord is saying that effectively, it was that generation who had locked John up and killed him.

Mk. 9:12 adds more detail to the Lord's words: "Elijah indeed comes first and restores all things. And how is it written of the Son of Man, that he should suffer many things and be set at nothing?". His question was (as so often with Him) in answer and response to their unexpressed question- that surely Elijah is to have a successful ministry and then the Messiah would begin His Kingdom in glory. The Lord was asking them the question about the prophesied sufferings and rejection of Messiah in order to answer the question He could see in their minds. So often "He answered and said…" something, when no question was verbalized. But He perceived the question in the minds of His audience, such was His

sensitivity. Only a week or so ago He had told them how messiah must "suffer many things" (Mt. 16:21) and now he uses the same phrase again- although it seems they had forgotten or not appreciated what He had then told them.

Whatever they would- Mk. 9:12 adds: "As it is written of him". There seems no specific prophecy stating that the Elijah prophet would be unsuccessful, unless one really reads between the lines of Malachi's prophecy about the Elijah prophet. More likely is that the "him" refers to the historical Elijah. All that was written of *him* had come true of John the Baptist, in that the alliance between Ahab and the manipulative Jezebel which led to Elijah's persecution was mirrored in that between Herod and the equally manipulative Herodias, which led to John's demise.

Likewise shall the Son of Man suffer by their hands- Mk. 9:12 extends this in saying that He would likewise "suffer many things and be set at nought". Significantly, the same Greek word is used in Lk. 23:11 to describe how Herod "set at nought" Jesus at His trial; and it was the same Herod who had John the Baptist murdered.

17:13 *Then understood the disciples that he spoke to them of John the Baptist*- Towards the end of Matthew 12 and throughout chapter 13, the Lord had explained at length how Israel *en masse* had *not* "understood" (the same word is used) about John, but the disciples *had* understood (Mt. 13:13-15,19,23). He then solemnly asked the disciples whether they had "understood" (s.w.; Mt. 13:51), and they assured Him that they had. They are presented as children, saying they understand when they don't. The Lord commended them for understanding when the masses didn't. But this understanding was imputed to them by Him. On one hand we see His simple and pure love for them, counting them as understanding what they didn't; on the other, we see how His hope that they would understand paid off, for they did finally. And this is the practical outworking of imputed righteousness and the status that is counted to us "in Christ"- we are to live out that status in practice, and the Lord works patiently with us to ensure that we do. And likewise in our pastoral work with others; faith and love and hope in others are at times rewarded, although not always.

17:14 *And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and knelt before him, saying*- This meeting with the crowd occurred the day after the transfiguration (Lk. 9:37)- presumably they slept up the mountain for the night. The transfiguration record is replete with references to the theophany on Sinai. Moses' return from the mount was to a faithless people of God, and the same is found here, in that the disciples had been unable to perform a healing which they had potentially been given the power to do.

Note how the three accounts dovetail so nicely: Jesus and the three with Him moved towards the crowd (Mt.), Jesus having noticed them from a distance (Mk.), and the crowd came towards them (Lk.). And as Jesus came (*erchomai*) towards the crowd, there came out of the crowd towards Him (*pros-erchomai*) the man who wanted a healing for his son (Mt.). Mark records that the people ran towards Jesus when they saw Him (Mk. 9:15- presumably His face was shining after the encounter, after the pattern of Moses), which explains why Luke says that the man had to 'cry out' from out of the crowd (Lk. 9:38- Gk. 'to holler', to get attention amidst the rush of all the others towards Jesus) and that Jesus firstly asked the Scribes what they were questioning His disciples about. We really can powerfully reconstruct the scene by putting the three different viewpoints together. Matthew focuses upon the man who came to Jesus wanting healing for his son. The best analogy is to cameramen. Matthew focuses close up upon one man; Mark is taking a broader view of the crowd as a whole, and therefore picks up the brief question to the Scribes first of all- they made no answer that is recorded, and the Lord's answer to whatever questions they were asking was given in the healing miracle. That there are no actual contradictions of fact or chronology is to me a profound internal evidence of an inspired record, with a common Divine hand behind all the authors. If these were three uninspired men writing their recollections some time after the event, or uninspired people writing down what had been passed down to them as originating with those men, then for sure there would be contradictions. Because misremembering of detail is just part of our human condition, and the supposed lengthy process of oral tradition would inevitably have meant there was further corruption and unclarity added. The lack of contradiction in the accounts and the way they complement each other so perfectly has to me the hallmark of the Divine. Even witnesses who agree together to lie in court and rehearse their stories many times over- still end up contradicting each other. But that is not the case with the Gospels.

Mark adds: "All the crowd, when they saw Him, were greatly amazed; and running to Him saluted Him" (Mk. 9:15). They ran up to Him- and He add Peter, James and John with Him. This sentence in Greek is intentionally similar to the account of Acts 3:11, where again "All the people [cp. "all the crowd"] ran [s.w. "running to Him"] together unto them… greatly wondering [s.w. "greatly amazed"]. The response of the crowd to Peter and John in Acts 3:11 could not possibly have been contrived by them. Their experience at the return from the transfiguration was to prepare them for their own later witness, when without the physical presence of Jesus, they were Him to the world. And the same kind of carefully, sensitively planned education of us is ongoing now. Not only do situations occur and then repeat in essence later in our lives, but what we go through in this life will only have understood meaning in the Kingdom, when we shall put into eternal practice what we are learning now. But for now, there is an inevitable difficulty in attaching meaning to event,

because we cannot foresee the billion situations in our eternities where we will put into practice what we are now learning.

17:15 *Lord, have mercy*- This is a phrase commonly used by those who besought the Lord for a miracle. But later in the New Testament, the word is used almost exclusively concerning the Lord's spiritual grace and mercy specifically in providing salvation. We are left wondering, therefore, whether each of those who requested such "mercy" were not thinking solely of physical healing, although that was obviously very much in their minds, but also had a sense of their need for spiritual healing, forgiveness and salvation. And this was what led to their requests for healing being positively received by the Lord. For presumably there were many requests for healing which were not met, seeing that the majority of the Lord's miracles were done in three small villages (see on 11:20).

On my son- His only child (Lk.).

For he is epileptic and suffers terribly- Literally, "Lunatic". Literally it means one who is "moon struck". It was once believed that if a person went out walking at night when there was a clear moon, they could get struck by the moon and become mentally ill. We use that word "lunatic" today to describe someone who is ill, but it does not mean that we believe mental illness is caused by the moon. If our words were written down and re-read in 2,000 years' time, people might think we believed that the moon caused illness; but they'd be wrong because we are just using the language of our day, as the Lord Jesus did 2,000 years ago. The New Testament likewise reflects this association between the moon and mental illness. "They brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, and those which were lunatick, and paralytics; and He healed them" (Mt. 4:24 A.V.). The repetition of the word "and..." gives the impression that every kind of illness- physical and mental, understood and not understood- was healed by the Lord Jesus. "Lunatick" translates the Greek *selēniazomai*- "to be moon struck", derived from the noun *selēnē*, the moon. It's not true that some mental illnesses come from being moon-struck. But the idea is used, without correction- just as the idea of 'demon possession' is in the preceding phrase.

For often he falls into the fire and often into the water- Descriptions of the rejected as gnashing teeth, cast into fire and water, wallowing helpless... is all the language of the demoniac (Mk. 9:18-22). This connection shows at least two things: that there will be a madness in the rejected, the tragic aimlessness of the demented. And secondly, that because the demoniac was cured, it is possible for a man whose behaviour leads to his condemnation *now* to still repent, before it's too late. And yet although the rejected may appear demented, they may well not feel like this. They will gnash their teeth with anger, not least against themselves. Being cast into fire or water were both figures of condemnation. The young man felt

he was worthy of condemnation- hence conviction of the Lord's saving mercy would have been enough to cure him of the deep sense of unworthiness which he had.

17:16 *So I brought him to your disciples*- Lk. 9:40 adds that he "besought" them, he begged them, to heal the child. According to Mark, when the father of the dumb child brought him to the disciples, he tells Jesus that "I brought unto thee my son", but the disciples couldn't cure him (Mk. 9:17 RV); he perceived Jesus as His followers, just as folk do today. The Lord had earlier given them power over "unclean spirits" (10:8)- but still they couldn't heal him. The power given to them was therefore potential power, but it was no guarantee that they would actually do the works. Alternatively, we could conclude that that power was only given to them temporarily. Or, that there is a difference between the twelve, and the more general "disciples" / followers of Jesus. However it would have been strange indeed if the man had not brought his son to the group of the twelve in the hope of healing. And it is the disciples, presumably the twelve, who then come to the Lord and ask why they could not perform the cure (:19).

But they could not cure him- They had no *dunamai* (possibility); Mk. 9:18 uses a different word- according to Mark, the man said that they "could not" using *ischuo* (more carrying the sense of physical power). The man therefore bewailed at least twice that the disciples couldn't help; and he asks the Lord Jesus to help "if You can" (Mk. 9:22- *dunamai*). They did have the possibility; but they lacked the faith to actualize it (Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:19,20 "I give unto you power… over all the power of the enemy… the spirits are subject unto you"). We too have been given potentials which require faith to exploit, and our failures to do so leave people with the impression that the Lord Himself is limited- for, like the disciples, we are His representatives in this world, and people coming to us are effectively coming to Him.

Mk. 9:23 adds that the father of the child was asked whether he could believe [i.e., that Jesus could cast out the demon]. The man replied that yes, although his faith was weak, he believed [that Jesus could cast out the demon]. His faith was focused on by Jesus, rather than his wrong beliefs. Faith above all was what the Lord was focusing on *in the first instance*. Mark also adds the detail that the Lord "asked his father: How long has this been happening to him? And he said: From a child. And often it has cast him both into the fire and into the waters to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him: Rather, if you can! All things are possible to him that believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out, and said: I believe! Help my disbelief!". It is a feature of our nature that we can believe and yet disbelieve at the same time. We frequently commit the horror of limiting God in our attitude to prayer. All too often we see

ourselves in the man who believed and yet still had unbelief: "If thou (Jesus) canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible" (Mk. 9:22,23). The man thought that Christ's power to help was limited: 'If you can do anything to help, well, please do'. The Lord Jesus turned things right round: 'If you can believe, anything's possible' - in other words, God can do anything, but His ability to directly respond to some particular need is limited by our faith, not by any intrinsic lack of ability within Himself. The man hadn't thought about this. He saw God as sometimes able to help a bit; Christ turned the man's words round to show that God's power is infinite, limited only by our faith. The word "believe" in Mk. 9:23 is omitted from many texts. Thus we could paraphrase: "Regarding that " If you can..." which you said- as regards that, well, all things are possible". This is the view of F.B. Meyer and Marvin Vincent. The RV reads: "And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth". It is clear enough that God at times limits His power. He *could* save everybody, indeed He wishes to do this, yet He allows human freewill to be genuine and meaningful, to the extent that not all will be saved. Israel in the wilderness "limited the Holy One of Israel". He was left by Israel as a mighty man powerless to save. The Greek word *dunatos* translated 16 times "mighty" is also 13 times translated "possible". God's might is His possibility. But our freewill can limit that might. All things are possible to God, and therefore all things are possible to the believer- but if the believer has no faith, then, those possibilities of God will not occur (Lk. 1:49; Mk. 9:23; 10:27). And so I have no problem with a God who limits His omniscience.

17:17 *And Jesus answered and said: O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you? How long must I tolerate you?*- An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in this exasperated comment. Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation…?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this. It was the disciples who were faithless (:20). In chapters 12 and 13, the Lord had drawn a clear difference between the disciples, and the unbelieving surrounding generation. It seems that He now despaired of whether that distinction was valid; He sees them, in the heat of that moment of bitter disappointment, as no better than the masses

who did not believe. The "faithless" will be condemned (Lk. 12:46 "his portion with the unbelievers", s.w.), and this is the term used about the world generally (1 Cor. 6:6; 7:12); or as the Lord puts it, this "generation". And yet the Lord uses it here about the disciples and again in Jn. 20:27. The very phrase "perverse generation" is used by Paul about the unbelieving world (Phil. 2:15). To use this term about the disciples is therefore significant; the Lord really felt that His faith and hope that they were different from the Jewish world had been misplaced. After His encounter with Elijah and Moses, he doubtless expected more of God's people.

This fits in with a Biblical theme- of people being confronted with acute spiritual temptation immediately after a highly spiritual experience. And this is true to life- so often, merely hours after a highly intense spiritual experience [e.g. at a breaking of bread meeting] we find ourselves assailed by temptation and spiritual depression. It's not that we are encountered by a physical person called 'Satan' immediately after our spiritual 'high'; rather it is a feature of human nature that the closer we come to God, the stronger is the tidal backwash of *internal* temptation immediately afterwards. Consider some examples:

- Noah walks off the ark, a superb triumph of faith, into a cleansed and pristine world, with the rainbow arch of God's grace above him- and gets dead drunk (Gen. 9:21-24).
- Moses renounced greatness, stood up for God's people and then left Egypt by faith, "not fearing the wrath of the king" (Heb. 11:27); and yet ended up fleeing in fear from Pharaoh (Ex. 2:14,15).
- Moses returned from the awesome meeting with God on Sinai and gave in to a flash of anger, during which he smashed the tables of the covenant- a covenant which had also been made with him personally.
- Israel were ecstatic with joy and confidence in God as they stood on the other side of the Red Sea- but very soon afterwards they were giving in to temptation in the wilderness, accusing God of intending to kill them and being careless for them.
- Judas went from the spiritual height of being present at the first "breaking of bread" meeting with the Lord Jesus, just prior to His death, directly into temptation from "the Devil" and then went out into the darkness of that night (Lk. 22:3).
- Soon after his spiritual triumph on Carmel, Elijah is to be found suicidal and bitter with God, and considering that the other faithful in Israel are in fact also apostate (1 Kings 19:4-11).
- Samson's life was full of giving in to spiritual temptation immediately after he had been empowered by God to do some great miracle.
- Immediately after having been saved by God's grace from a huge invasion (2 Sam. 11), David sins with Bathsheba and murders Uriah (2 Sam. 12).
- After the wonder of having a terminal illness delayed by 15 years in

response to prayer, Hezekiah gives in to the temptation to be proud and selfish in the events of Is. 39.
- Soon after the wonder of the miracles of the loaves and fishes, the disciples hardened their heart to it and accused Jesus of not caring for them (Mk. 4:38; 6:52).
- Paul straight after his wonderful vision of "the third heaven" finds himself struggling with a "thorn in the flesh", a term I have elsewhere suggested may refer to a spiritual weakness or temptation (2 Cor. 12:7).
- After the wonder of baptism and the confirming voice from Heaven, Jesus was immediately assaulted by major temptation in the wilderness.

This is surely the most graphic and intense expression of frustration in the entire recorded history of the Lord Jesus. His frustration was with how His disciples were not living up to their potential, and how faithless they were. And we daily exhibit the same terribly disappointing characteristics. But *how long* may not necessarily be a cry of exasperation- although it could be that. There can also be the sense of 'Until when?', and the time in view was the Lord's death. John's Gospel records the Lord several times speaking of how His hour or time had not yet come, and how He agonized until it did. That end point was clearly the moment when He cried from the cross "It is finished".

When Jesus returned from the Mount of Transfiguration, He found that the disciples had failed to do a cure because of their lack of faith. He describes them as [part of] a “faithless generation” again indicating how the disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the “generation” or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: “Let your disciples see your work… show yourself to the world”.

Bring him here to me- The man had brought [s.w. "bring"] his son to the disciples, they couldn't heal him, and so the Lord asks for the child to be brought to Him personally. And yet He had taught that in their witness, the disciples were Him to this world. Coming to them was coming to Him. But He despaired that in this case, there was now a difference between them and Him. They were unable to manifest Him as they should because of their lack of faith. And there are times when our status as 'brethren in Christ' likewise fails, and we fail to be Him to this world and He has to intervene and reveal Himself more directly to men.

Mk. 9:19 records how He asked for the son to be brought *pros* Me, literally, 'here with Me'; but this is the same term used in the Lord's lament: "How long shall I be with [*pros*] you?". The Lord's physical presence was required for this miracle- the son must be "here" (Mt.), "with Me" (Mk.). But the Lord was making the point that He would not always be literally with them, and then such cures would have to be done by the disciples without His physical presence. And it seems He despaired as to whether they were ready for this.

17:18 *And Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him*- There are a number of parallels between the language used of 'casting out' demons, and that used about healings. Jesus "rebuked" demons in Mk. 9:25, and yet He "rebuked" a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mt. 8:26). Demons are spoken of as having "departed" (Mt. 17:18), yet we read of leprosy 'departing' (Mk. 1:42) and diseases 'departing' after cure (Acts 19:12). I'd go so far as to say that every case of a person being spoken of as demon possessed has its equivalent in diseases which we can identify today – e.g. epilepsy, schizophrenia. The peoples of the first century, and their predecessors, believed that demons and the Satan monster were somehow associated with water- that was why, they figured, the water mysteriously kept moving, and at times blew up into storms. When we read of God 'rebuking' the waters and making them calm or do what He wished (Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9), we're effectively being told that Yahweh of Israel is so infinitely superior to those supposed demons and sea monsters that for God's people, they have no effective existence. The Lord Jesus taught the same lesson when He 'rebuked' the sea and wind during the storm on the lake (Mt. 8:26). The same Greek word is used to described how He 'rebuked' demons (Mt. 17:18 etc.). I have no doubt that the Lord Jesus didn't believe there was a Loch Ness-type monster lurking in Galilee which He had to rebuke in order to save the disciples from the storm; and likewise He spoke of 'rebuking' demons as a similar way of teaching others that *whatever* ideas they had about demons, He was greater and was in a position to 'rebuke' them. Likewise He assured His men that they had the power to tread on snakes, scorpions, and all their enemies (Lk. 10:17-20). The image of a victorious god trampling his foes and snakes underfoot was well established in the surrounding cultures, and had entered Judaism. The Lord is teaching those fearful men that OK, if that's your perception of things, well, in your terms, you have ultimate victory through working 'in My name'. It must be noted that the man had previously described the boy's condition as being due to how "A spirit seizes him… and it *departs* from him with great difficulty" (Lk. 9:39). The condition was intermittent (consistent with viewing the condition as epilepsy rather than actual, literal manipulation by a spirit or demon). Trying various remedies, probably including beating him, the condition 'departed'. The Lord's cure is described in the same terms, with the implication that it was total and permanent, rather than partial and temporary, as their 'healings' were. The Lord said that the 'spirit' would never again enter the boy (Mk. 9:25).

And the boy was cured from that moment- The immediate effect of the Lord's healings contrasted sharply with those of faith healers, both then and now.

Mk. 9:27 adds that the Lord touched him and lifted him up- exactly what He had done to the terrified disciples on the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:7 s.w.). By doing so, it was made apparent that the disciples (even the

three best of them) needed healing themselves rather than being in a position to perform the miracles, as the Lord had hoped they could; and as indeed they could.

17:19 *Then came the disciples to Jesus privately, and said*- In a house (Mk.).

Why could we not cast it out?- They were surprised at their inability, which suggests they had performed such cures before and had faith that they could do miracles. The Lord's explanation in the next verse that they had no faith ("unbelief", *a-pisteo*, no faith) would therefore have been hard for them to initially accept. His idea was that we either believe or do not believe, and often what seems to us as faith, even if it is admittedly small faith, is ultimately not faith. John's Gospel even more clearly presents faith as something one either has or doesn't have. And yet in reality there are gradations of faith, and the Bible recognizes this. The Lord's next comment that "*If* you [really, as you think] have faith as a grain of mustard seed..." was therefore speaking to their assumption that although their faith was small, they did actually believe. Again we see how the Lord sees to the inner, unexpressed thoughts and positions of His audiences, and addresses them. This presentation of faith as an absolute, a black or white position (and John's Gospel stresses this even more), is a huge challenge to examine our faith.

17:20 *And he said to them: Because of your little faith*- See on :19 *Why could we not*. “Ye of little faith” (Lk. 12:22,28); they had “no faith” (Mk. 4:40). “Where is your faith?” (Lk. 8:25). They asked for their faith to be increased (Lk. 17:5). Luke records that the Centurion had more faith than the disciples (Lk. 7:9). The Gospel writers were very self-critical regarding their own faith in the message they were now preaching. They openly admit that they didn’t have enough faith to cure the sick boy. Jesus told them this: it was “because of your little faith…if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove…” (Mt. 17:20 RV). Think carefully what is going on here. They had not even faith as a tiny grain of mustard seed; they didn’t have the faith to cure the boy. But Jesus says they did have “little faith”. He recognized what insignificant faith they did have. He was so sensitive to the amount of faith in someone, even if it was insignificant in the final analysis. We likewise need to be able to positively and eagerly discern faith in those we preach to and seek to spiritually develop. In a similar kind of way, God was disappointed that His people had not only been disobedient to *Him,* but they had not even been obedient to their conquerors (Ez. 5:7). He so values obedience, and had an attitude that sought to see if they would show it to at least someone, even if they had rejected *Him*.

For truly I say to you: If you have faith as small as a mustard seed- This calls for obvious connection to the Lord's earlier likening of the Gospel of

the Kingdom to a grain of mustard seed which then grows into a great tree (13:31; Lk. 13:19). The Lord then had been explaining that although the disciples' faith was small, and His plans for the Kingdom had tiny, almost invisible beginnings in that group of disciples, yet they would grow into the Kingdom. But now, in the heat of this disappointed moment, the Lord feels that the disciples don't even have such beginnings. In this frustration and deep disappointment we have yet another window into the Lord's utter humanity.

You shall say to this mountain- Just a very small amount of real faith during this life will enable us to move "this mountain", perhaps referring to Mount Zion. The idea of Mount Zion being moved sends the mind to Zech. 14:4,5, describing how Mount Zion will be moved at the Lord's return; and also to Ps. 125:1, which speaks of how they who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed; and yet Christ said we *will* remove it by prayer. The point of these allusions is surely to show that real faith will bring about the coming of the Kingdom, which is a totally super-human achievement; the unshakeableness of Mount Zion is likened to the solidity of true faith. The Lord's point seems to be that if we truly believe, then the coming of the Kingdom will be brought about by our faith; the outcome of our faith in this life will be seen in the Kingdom. But what our faith will achieve in the Kingdom will be hugely out of proportion to what it really is now. But there is another way to read Mt. 17:20: "If ye have (now) faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall (in the Kingdom) say to this mountain (of Zion), Remove hence..."; as if in the Kingdom we will be control of the physical world as the Lord was even in His mortality. In this case, His commanding of the sea and waves will be shared by us in the Kingdom; not just sea and waves, but mountains too (Mt. 8:27).

But the Lord spoke these words at the foot of the mount of transfiguration, and the more comfortable interpretation would be to think of Him saying these words with a nod towards the mountain from which He had just come down. Real faith would enable that Kingdom experience to be replicated anywhere. The vision of the Kingdom which had been seen there could be moved anywhere- by faith. There was maybe another gentle encouragement for them to think in terms of God's Kingdom as not being geographically limited, but capable of removal to the Gentiles, if they had faith. The Lord uses similar words after cursing the fig tree, symbolic of Israel and God's ultimate destruction of her: "If you have faith and doubt not, you shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if you shall say to this mountain: Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done" (Mt. 21:21). In that passage, the mountain is almost certainly a reference to Mount Zion. The sea was symbolic of the Gentile world, and so the Lord would be developing His teaching which began here at the mount of transfiguration- the things of the Kingdom, centred

as they then were in the mountains of Israel, could be moved to the Gentile world by faith.

Move from here to there, and it will move- Ps. 46:2 was perhaps in the Lord's mind: "Therefore we won't be afraid though the earth shakes, though the mountains are moved into the heart of the seas". In this case, the Lord would be suggesting that if we have real faith, we will not fear the results of that faith. We will not fear mountains being cast into the sea; and it is fear which holds us back from faith, we unconsciously fear the answer we apparently seek in prayer.

Nothing shall be impossible for you- With *God* nothing is impossible (Lk. 1:37- the only other occurrence of the word in the NT), but here nothing is impossible *unto us*. God's possibility is our possibility; and this is what the Lord was teaching the man who thought that it all depended upon the Lord's possibility alone. There are other instances where the extent and nature of the Lord's healing seems to have been limited by the faith of the recipient (Mt. 8:13 "as... so"; 9:29 "according to"; 12:22 "inasmuch").

17:21 *But this kind*- This kind of demon? In this case, the Lord is again using their wrong ideas (in this case, about some demons being stronger than others) without really believing them, talking to them in terms which they understood.

Will not go out- Angels are of course active in answering our prayer, obeying the commanding voice of God Himself in Heaven- answers to prayer "go… out" by prayer and fasting (Mt. 17:21). The answer to prayer is therefore likened to a 'going out'- of the Angel and command from the throne of grace? This language of 'going out' is frequently used in the Old Testament about the going forth of the cherubim Angels. See Is. 37:36 for another example.

Except by prayer and fasting- Which evidently, the disciples should have done but had not. The Lord wasn't naive, although He was so positive. He told the disciples quite frankly here that they were full of "unbelief", and couldn't do miracles which He expected them to because they didn't pray and fast (:19-21). And yet when quizzed by the Pharisees as to why His disciples didn't fast, He said it was because they were so happy to be with Him, the bridegroom (Mt. 9:15). Here surely He was seeing the best in them. They come over as confused, mixed up men who wanted the Kingdom there and then and were frustrated at the Lord's inaction in establishing it. But He saw that they recognized Him as the bridegroom, as Messiah, and He exalted in this, and saw their lack of fasting as partly due to the deep-down joy which He knew they had. Perhaps they tried to do this miracle without even praying about it (Mk. 9:29). Or maybe they prayed only on a surface level, and it was not counted as real prayer. Only intense prayer could send forth this kind of answer from God; He does not act on emotional grounds, just because He feels sorry for

somebody. It needs to be noted that initially the man's child was not cured because the disciples didn't have the faith to do it. This teaches that God's activity for others is partly dependent on the prayers of a third party. These words are applied to us all in 1 Cor. 7:5, the only other place in the NT where they occur together; we are to give ourselves to prayer and fasting in domestic married life with the passion and intensity required to perform a miracle.

17:22 *And while they stayed in Galilee, Jesus said to them*- Luke adds that the curing of the young man led to wonder and amazement at His healing power, but He wished the disciples to realize that the crowds would all the same turn against Him: "But while all were marvelling at all the things which He did, He said to His disciples: Let these words sink into your ears. For the Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men" (Lk. 9:43,44). The note that He reminded them about His passion whilst they were still in Galilee is another hint at the Lord's structured approach to training the twelve. Before they went back to Jerusalem, He wanted them to be aware well ahead of time that He was going to His death. Mark adds that He didn't want people to know of His presence because He was teaching the disciples about His death. Once again we encounter the theme of the Lord intensely focusing upon His disciples rather than upon the masses of Israel. It could be argued that He could have healed far more people had He not had this policy; but His long term intention was to create a solid body of followers who would bring His message to the world after His death. And we must likewise achieve a balance between good deeds for the world, and the need for strengthening the body of believers.

The Son of Man shall be delivered up into the hands of men- Mk. 9:31 puts this in the present tense- He *is* betrayed / delivered [s.w.]. The Lord likely said both- He shall be betrayed, [in fact] He is being betrayed / delivered. This is the sense recorded in John, of "the time comes but now is" (Jn. 4:23; 16:32). He knew that the essence of the delivering over to the Jews / Romans was happening right then, although the final delivering / handing over was when in Gethsemane He said that "the hour is come… the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Mk. 14:41). The word for 'betrayed' means literally to be handed over or delivered, and so the Lord's statement wouldn't have necessarily implied to them that there was to be a betrayal from amongst their own number.

17:23 *And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised up*- Clearly the rising again was at a specific moment, "the third day". This is proof enough that the Bible intends us to see the Lord's rising again as bodily resurrection and not some spiritual reincarnation over a period of time.

And they were greatly distressed- Luke notes that the saying about the cross was "hidden" from them (Lk. 9:45). And yet in prayer to the Father,

He rejoices that these things are not hidden from them (Lk. 10:21,23). This gives insight into the Lord's present mediation for us in prayer- speaking of us as far better than we are. The message of Christ crucified was "hid" from them (Lk. 9:45; 18:34)- and Paul surely alludes to this when he says that this message is hid by the veil of Judaism from those who are lost (2 Cor. 4:3). Luke adds that straight afterwards, "there arose a dispute among them, which of them was the greatest" (Lk. 9:46). Time and again we see this in the Gospels- when the Lord speaks of His upcoming death, the disciples change the subject. This explains our own problem with mind wandering at the breaking of bread or in the study or even reading of the crucifixion accounts. This difficulty on focusing upon Him there is likely because His death requires our death and suffering, and subconsciously we realize that- and would rather not.

17:24 *And when they arrived in Capernaum, they that collected the tribute money*- Matthew was also from Capernaum (9:9), so these were his one time colleagues. Josephus says that the temple tax was payable in March, a month before Passover. This would suggest that Matthew is now recording incidents in the final month of the Lord's life. The half shekel (as RV) of the temple tax (Ex. 30:11-16). This had to be paid in the old coinage of Israel, and the money changers in the temple converted Roman money into this coinage at a large profit. It was their tables which the Lord overthrew.

Came to Peter and said: Does not your teacher pay the tribute money?- Even outsiders considered Peter to be representative of all the disciples (Mt. 17:24). "Peter and those with him" is how the group is described (Mk. 1:36; Lk. 8:45 Gk.; 9:32). Peter's crucial confession that he believed that Jesus was the Son of God is repeated almost verbatim by all the disciples, some time later (Jn. 6:69; 16:30). He is portrayed as the representative disciple. It is Peter who answers when the Lord asks a question of them all (Mk. 8:29 cp. the other accounts). The way Jesus looks upon all the disciples as He speaks to Peter makes Peter some kind of representative of them all in the Lord's eyes (Mk. 8:33). In Mt. 16:17 Peter is commended for having had the Father reveal Jesus to Him. Yet Mt. 11:27 says that the Father reveals the identity of His Son to *all* who truly come to Him. Thus Peter is representative of all who have truly perceived the Son's identity in Jesus of Nazareth. In one Gospel, all the disciples ask a question, while in the parallel passage Peter is stated to have asked it (Mk. 7:17 cp. Mt. 15:15 and Mt. 21:20 cp. Mk. 11:21).

17:25 *He said: Yes*- The question naturally arises as to why, then, the Lord miraculously provided a coin to pay the temple tax if He had already paid it; and why that coin only paid for Jesus and Peter, and not for the other disciples. Another question is why this tax had to be paid in

Capernaum (:24) and not in Jerusalem or the home towns of the disciples. My suggestion is that the payment of that tax at that time and place was unnecessary, but the Lord did so in the spirit of His teaching about offering to go two miles when asked to go one; or offering the undergarment to him who asks your cloke. In commenting upon those teachings, I made the point that such offers restored the balance of power to the abused and took it away from the abusers, who would feel awkward accepting the offer. And we are therefore left to wonder as to whether the coin was really accepted by the questioners. It would've seemed a chronic waste of money to the unspiritual, but the Lord works on a higher level than the pragmatic and utilitarian.

The Pharisees taught that one could only worship in the temple if the temple tax had been paid (Jostein Adna, *The Formation of the Early Church*, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) p. 27). The Lord could have engaged with that wrong view in direct confrontation. But He didn't. In His gracious way, He once again went along with misunderstandings by paying what was required, and yet His example and teaching demonstrated that service to God was totally independent of such human demands. The children of God who are "free" from such taxes could be understood as all Israel, and more specifically, the new Israel, comprised of God's own Son and His disciples.

And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first of all, saying- The Greek word for "first of all" really means 'to anticipate'. Again we see the Lord's sensitivity in knowing what is in human nature. So often we read that He "answered and said…" when there had been no stated question. That acute sensitivity to human thinking and situations remains with Him to this day, and should be a great comfort to us at the day of judgment.

Simon. What do you think? The kings of the earth, from whom do they receive toll or tribute? From their own children, or from strangers?- There was a double meaning here, for there is in Semitic languages 'the plural of majesty', whereby the plural can be used to speak of one great thing. The great king of the earth was God. His children are therefore free from the demands of men; but the Lord goes on to teach that we should all the same submit to those demands in order not to make them stumble. Another approach is invited by the possibility that the phrase "kings of the earth" has been consciously lifted from Ps. 2:2 LXX, which speaks of how "The kings of the earth… and the rulers… take counsel / were gathered together against Yahweh and His Christ". One of the many applications of this verse is to the rulership of the earth / land of Israel collaborating in the crucifixion of Christ and later of His disciples (Acts 4:26; note how He

speaks of "the rulers *of the Gentiles*" in 20:25). There are indirect applications of Ps. 2:2 to the Jewish leadership in Mt. 22:34; 26:3,4. The priesthood of the time has been described as "A priestly aristocracy"; therefore the language of kingship was not inappropriate to them. Josephus speaks of the priesthood as this: "The constitution became an aristocracy, and the High Priests were entrusted with the leadership of the nation" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20:10, 5). So it could well be that these rulers which the Lord was focusing on were the Jewish religious rulers and priests of the day, and their children were free from the temple tax. Yet the Lord argues that the disciples are likewise free from it- because they were the new priesthood.

Again we note the high status the Lord argues for His followers- the children of kings, and in this case, the King of all the earth. The implication was that the Jews who paid the temple tax, considering it as the highest sign of their membership in God's people (as it was a voluntary tax), were in fact thereby showing that they were strangers, Gentiles, and not His true children.

17:26 *And when he said 'From strangers', Jesus said to him: Therefore the children are free*- Barnes summarizes the argument: "Kings do not tax their own sons. This tribute-money is taken up for the temple service; that is, the service of my Father. I, therefore, being the Son of God, for whom this is taken up, cannot be lawfully required to pay this tribute". Peter later asks his sheep: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man… unto governors… *as free*… honour all men" (1 Pet. 2:13-17). This is all evident allusion to the way he had once felt that as free in Christ and in Israel, he didn't need to submit to men and pay taxes. But the Lord had gently rebuked him, and provided the coin to pay for them both (Mt. 17:25-27). The Gospels records would have been well known amongst the early believers; there is a tradition that at least the Gospel of Mark was learnt by heart as part of instruction for baptism. Peter's readers would have known of the incident, and now, here he is telling them to learn the lesson he had had to learn. The Lord seems to make a concession to the inability of the surrounding world to understand Him, when He tells Peter that as God's people, they are free from the requirement to pay taxes to the present world. But "lest we should offend them", we should pay them (Mt. 17:27). As the Lord spoke to men according to their level of ability to comprehend Him (Mk. 4:33; and consider how He used the language of demons), so should we.

The statement that His followers were "free" from paying the temple tax was effectively a statement that the Lord's greatness as "one greater than the temple" (12:6) meant that He was at liberty to therefore abrogate the teaching of Torah- for Ex. 30:13,14 did indeed stipulate a temple tax. His

overturning of the tables of the moneychangers, who enabled the payment of the temple tax in practice (21:12-17) was likewise effectively stating that the temple tax law was not binding on His followers. The Lord taught that the tax should be paid so as not to offend the potential Christian faith of the Jews, rather than because it was a question of obedience to Divine law- because that law was ended.

Another consideration is that the Lord is alluding to the Jewish idea that the priests themselves were exempted from the temple tax (*Sheqalim* 1.8)- because He considered His followers the new priesthood. He had used the same argument in justifying why the disciples could grind corn on the Sabbath- they were, He implied, like the priests who could even eat the showbread on the Sabbath.

17:27 *However, not to give offence to them*- This sets the scene for the Lord's sober teaching about the eternal danger of offending others (i.e. making them to spiritually stumble) in 18:6-9. His own example was of supreme effort not to offend others. He likewise carefully explained to His disciples the likely sequence of events surrounding His death "so that you should not be offended" (Jn. 16:1). But He also knew that they would be offended because of those things (Mt. 26:31). But so sensitive was He to the tragedy of others stumbling that He as it were laboured against His own foreknowledge, so that others would not be offended in Him. We are without doubt to take His example to ourselves, and go to any lengths to ensure that others do not stumble, especially because of us. The Lord specifically focused upon Peter, in order to teach him the extent we should go to in order not to offend others; because He had recently rebuked Peter for being a cause of stumbling to Him (Mt. 16:23). Not to offend others was a major plank of the Lord's teaching- it was the epitome of the kind of iniquity which would exclude from His Kingdom (Mt. 13:41), and literally any length must be gone to in order not to offend (cutting out own eyes, hands etc.; Mt. 5:29,30). Paul speaks of divisions and offences which are contrary to the doctrine learnt by the early Christians (Rom. 16:17). That "doctrine" or teaching would've been the Gospels themselves; and these teachings about not offending others were therefore up front as first principles in the early church. We do well to note that Paul brackets together divisions and offences; spiritual stumbling so often comes from division, and those who cause division thereby make others stumble. This is so true to observed reality amongst us- people spiritually stumble because of their exposure to divisions.

As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father’s house, Jesus didn’t have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn’t need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father’s glory. And so He told Peter that “lest we should offend them”, He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that

He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. The Lord spoke of not making the Orthodox Jews stumble by not paying the tribute; yet He goes on to say that one must beware lest we make the little ones who believe, to stumble (Mt. 17:27; 18:6). Is it not that He saw in Orthodox Jewry the beginnings of faith… a faith which was to come to fruition when a great company of priests were later obedient to the faith in Him? None of us would have had that sensitivity, that hopefulness, that seeking spirit. It is truly a challenge to us. In those last six months, the Scribes and Pharisees repeatedly tried to trick the Lord. But He took the time to answer their questions, seeking to lead them to understanding and repentance- and His denunciations of them were probably softly and imploringly spoken, still seeking for the inevitability of future judgment to lead them to repentance. As the Son of God, walking freely in His Father's house, Jesus didn't have to pay the temple tax (Mt. 17:26,27). He could have insisted that He didn't need to pay it, He could have stood up for what was right and true. But doing this can often be selfish, a defence of self rather than a seeking for the Father's glory. And so He told Peter that "lest we should offend them", He would pay it. He was so hopeful for their salvation one day that He was worried about offending these wretched men, who weren't fit to breathe the same air that He did. We would have given up with them; but He worried about offending what potential faith they might have. Even at the end of His ministry, He still sought to convert them. He reasoned with them, using carefully prepared Old Testament allusions in the hope they would understand them, when we would almost certainly either have given up, or would just be gritting our teeth, trying to be patient with them because we didn't want to sin…but He was full of a genuine, unpretended desire for their salvation. See on 8:4.

Acting as He would act is really the whole key to not giving offence / causing others to stumble. He above all valued the human person to an extent no other human being has ever reached. When asked to pay the temple tax, which apparently few people paid in Galilee at that time, the Lord did so "lest we should offend them"- even though, as He explained to Peter, He was exempted from it, as the Son in His Father's house (Mt. 17:27). He could have appealed to higher principle. But the Lord was worried that somehow He might make these apparently mercenary, conscience-less legalists to stumble in their potential faith. We would likely have given up with them as not worth it. But the Lord saw the potential for faith within them. And only a few verses later we are reading Him warning that those who offend the little ones who believe in Him will be hurled to destruction (Mt. 18:6). Could it not be that the Lord saw in those hard hearted, hateful legalists in the ecclesia of His day…little ones who potentially would believe in Him? And His positive, hopeful view of them paid off. For a year or so later those types were being baptized,

along with a great company of priests. People change. Remember this, and given that fact, try to hope for the best, as your Lord does with you. People *can* change, and they *do* change, even those whom at present you just can't abide in the brotherhood.

Go to the sea, cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find- Peter still carried his fishing tackle round with him in his pack, apparently. He had a strong attraction to fishing, almost making us wonder whether "Do you love Me more than these?" was a reference to the haul of fish lying there when the Lord spoke those words. His claim in Mk. 10:28 to have "left all" wasn't really totally true. He evidently had in mind how he had left his nets and walked away, following Jesus (Mk. 1:18). Then he thought he was following Jesus in the way the Lord demanded. For some time later, the Lord "entered into one of the ships, which was (i.e. still, at that time) Simon's…" (Lk. 5:1). Peter had been fishing all night in Jn. 21:3- strange, for a man who had so dramatically left his nets to respond to the Lord's call. But after the miraculous catch of fishes, Peter "forsook all, and followed him". Note that Mark's [Peter's] Gospel omits many incidents, but also uses the device of repetition to stress what the writer considers significant. Thus in Mk. 1:16 Peter tells us twice that he *was* a fisherman [cp. 14:68]. By the time of Lk. 18 and the conversation with the rich young man, Peter was confident he had forsaken all. But "I go a fishing" (Jn. 21:3) would suggest that even this forsaking of all had not been so dramatic. The boats were still there. The Lord had taught that following Him meant not just leaving behind for a moment, but selling up and giving the money to the poor. This Peter had not done. But he assumed that because he was physically following Jesus, well therefore what the Lord demanded of the rich young man, he had as good as done; for that young man wouldn't follow Jesus, but Peter would. It is easy to understand how Peter reasoned- for the fact we are apparent followers of the Lord in a world which chooses to reject Him, can lead to an assumption that we must of course be following just as He asks of us.

A coin. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself- A *stater*, a shekel (RV)- enough to pay two half shekel taxes, for Peter and Himself (see on :24).

The whole incident of fishing for the coin in order to provide the temple tax is somewhat strange at first blush- until we realize that it is in fact a further commentary upon the prediction of the Lord's death which He has just made in the immediately preceding verses. The temple tax was Biblically described as "the atonement money" (Ex. 30:16), "a ransom for his soul" (Ex. 30:12), and this led the Jews to claim that all who paid it therefore were represented in the sacrifices offered on the temple altar. It's therefore logical that this incident follows straight on from the Lord's prediction of His death on the cross. The Mishnah made the connection

clearly when commenting upon the temple tax: "R. Eleazar (the Amora) further said: a man would pay his Shekel and thus obtain atonement" (*Baba Bathra* 9a). The coin He provided was to be given "for Me and you", the *anti* (translated "for") suggesting that the coin was *instead of* or *representative of* 'Me and you'. At least theoretically, the temple tax was used to buy the animals which were sacrificed- and so the Lord would be teaching that He provided the atonement money, the ransom, because He was the animal sacrificed. And He provided for both Himself and Peter, representative of all the disciples at this moment (see on :24), in that His sacrifice was the basis of His own redemption insofar as He too was human. If Matthew indeed is bringing out a more figurative aspect of the story, this would explain the rather strange way the questioners are recorded as asking "Does your Master *teleo* tribute?" (:24). *Teleo* means to fulfil; and this is how the word is usually used in the New Testament. There were more obvious words which could have been used to express the simple idea of 'payment'. The usage of the word surely hints at the Lord Jesus not just paying but fulfilling the type of the temple tax. It's noteworthy that here in Mt. 17 we have the second prediction of the Lord's sufferings and death. The first prediction was also followed by an allusion to the temple tax- the Lord speaks there of what a man could give "in exchange [s.w. 'ransom'] for his soul" (Mt. 16:26)- the very phrase used in the LXX of Ex. 30:12, which speaks of the temple tax as "a ransom for his soul". And in that same context in Mt. 16, the Lord speaks of His resurrection as being predicted in "the sign of the prophet Jonah", whereby salvation was in the mouth of the fish. And that theme is here continued. The third prediction of the passion is likewise followed by the statement that the Lord's death was "a ransom for many" (20:28)- yet another allusion to the temple tax of Ex. 30:12. The initial question was whether the Lord paid the temple tax. As so often, He answers the question with a meta principle which places the issues so far higher than the original question. He was providing the actual atonement money, ransom and sacrifice which the temple tax prefigured. He *was* those things. To ask Him to pay a coin to a corrupt religious leader was so irrelevant and inappropriate. And yet having made the point, in His grace and condescension to human weakness, He still pays the coin in concern that otherwise, the potential faith of those legalists might be somehow hindered.

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CHAPTER 18

18:1 *At that time*- At the end of chapter 17, the Lord has spoken of His death. According to the parallel records, the disciples had been arguing amongst themselves as to who was or would be the greatest amongst them in the Kingdom. This detail is omitted in Matthew because he seems to want to emphasize how in the light of the Lord's prediction of His death, the disciples still argued about petty things and were divided amongst themselves because of their own pride. In the shadow of the cross. Again we see how self-critical were the Gospel preachers and writers- for the Gospels are transcripts of how they usually preached the Gospel message.

The disciples came to Jesus, saying- Their arguments and divisions had been carefully conducted by them outside of His earshot, just as we can wrongly assume that our own church politics are somehow not in His presence. The Lord knew their discussions, for He asked them what they had been arguing about, and they refused to say (Mk. 9:33,34). Lk. 9:46,47 makes clear His perception: "There arose a reasoning (Gk. *dialogismos*) among them, which of them was greatest. And Jesus perceiving the thought (Gk. *dialogismos*) of their heart...". In any case, they gave the game away by asking who was greatest in the Kingdom. Luke is bringing home the point that the discussion amongst them also took place within their hearts; the thoughts of jealousy gave direct birth to the words spoken.

Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven- The present tense suggests that they had accepted the Lord's frequent teaching in the parables of the Kingdom that the rulership, the dominion of God is in essence now amongst His followers. They wanted to know which of them He considered the greatest. We could possibly infer that there was a perception that one of them, presumably Peter, was perceived by the Lord as the greatest. And they disagreed with that judgment. The Lord had indeed spoken of "the least in the Kingdom" (11:1), which suggests He did indeed see some element of gradation amongst His followers. Without doubt, Peter, James and John formed an inner three whom the Lord appeared to have especial hopes for, and out of them, Peter was the one the Lord seemed to have especial hopes for, and it had just recently been demonstrated in 17:24 that Peter was perceived even by outsiders as the leader of the pack. The Lord's response was that whoever became as the little child "is greatest in the Kingdom" (:4)- again, using the present tense, as if He saw the essence of His Kingdom as already existing in the form of the disciples. And yet He seems to suggest that their focus should be upon *entering* the Kingdom (:3) rather than being the greatest in it. The suggestion was that He doubted whether they had yet entered that community as they should have done; they had yet to be "converted" (:3). But at other times, He is so positive about them, especially when justifying and defending them to the unbelieving world

around them. This is typical of love. Love is not blind, the weaknesses of the beloved are noted and commented upon, and yet the object of love is still seen as wonderful and spoken positively of to others. The whole Biblical teaching of justification and imputed righteousness is really just the logical outflow of the love of God and His Son for us.

The Lord had repeatedly implied that He would be the greatest in the Kingdom, because He humbled Himself the most. When the disciples asked Him "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom?" (Mt. 18:1), they therefore reflected a complete lack of appreciation of *His* greatness. The disciples' immaturity and squabbling amongst themselves had led them to forget the superlative greatness of the One who stood and sat and walked amongst them. And conversely, they had failed to allow His surpassing greatness to make all discussion about which of them was the greatest absolutely irrelevant. Thus their perception of His greatness, the extent of it, and the nature of it, only grew *after* His death.

Mk. 9:35 adds that before the Lord called the child to Him, He made the comment that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all". The Lord Himself on the cross was the ultimate "servant of all", and therefore was the first of all. This may explain the Lord's comment that the last shall be first and the first last (Mt. 19:30)- He may have intended us to read in an ellipsis to the effect that he who *wants to be* first shall be last, and he who *wants to be* last shall be first. There was to be a glorying in being the last, the servant of all- exemplified in the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet.

18:2 *And he called to himself*- Just as the Lord is often described as calling the disciples. The idea is that those called, which included the disciples, should be as little children.

A little child- The disciples are framed as doing exactly the opposite soon afterwards, when they forbad the little children [s.w.] to come to Jesus (19:13)- whereas the Lord actually invited them to Him. Again we note how the Gospel writers present the disciples as so often out of step with their Lord.

And set him- The Greek means to stand, not to sit- this is how it is usually translated. Mk. 9:35,36 says that the Lord *sat* but He *stood* the child in their midst. But *histemi*, often translated "set" in Mt. 18:2, has the strong connotation of standing up or setting someone up in a position. "The midst" suggests the disciples were in a closed circle, and the Lord stood the child within the circle. If you call an onlooking child into the midst of a group of unknown adults, they will typically not want to come. We see the powerful attraction of the Lord to children in that this child came, although likely with much nervousness, wanting to come to Jesus,

but not into that closed circle of men- just as so many today. Almost certainly the child came to the Lord and He held the child close to Himself; for He goes on to urge the disciples to "receive" such little ones, implying they were reluctant to have the child amongst them. That closeness to the Lord was what was being set up as an example. The scene is portrayed graphically if we put the Gospel records together- the Lord *sat* with the men in a circle around Him, He calls the child to Him, stands him up "by Him" (*para* Him means close by Him, Lk. 9:47) and then 'takes' him, cuddling the child to Himself "in His arms" (Mk. 9:36)- whilst He is sitting down. The natural response of the child who had been stood would be to want to sit down, holding on to Jesus, and not to stand above those men with their attention focused upon him. This natural desire to come down, to humble self, is what is being memorialized by the Lord as the pattern for all who wish to enter His Kingdom. Perhaps we can imagine the scene even further- the child would've wanted to come to Jesus personally, but the circle of disciples with their apparent superiority and judgmentalism would've been offputting. But still the child came, and the Lord in Luke's record urges the disciples to allow the child to join the circle and "receive" him. This scenario is seen so often in the body of Christ in our days. In the early church, there soon developed a problem about 'receiving' others, not least children, women and Gentiles- and the Gospel records through this incident show how seriously wrong the disciples were not to do so. Luke's record goes on to record the incident with John's disciples where the Lord's disciples didn't want to "receive" them- implying they did not immediately grasp the teaching themselves.

In the midst of them- This phrase is used several times about the Lord Jesus Himself standing in the midst of His followers (Lk. 24:36; Jn. 1:26; 8:9; 20:19,26). The supreme "child" was the Lord Jesus. This connection between Him and that child was it seems perceived by Peter later, when he uses the same word to describe the Lord Jesus as God's "holy child" (Acts 4:27,30). If as suggested the Lord held the child to Himself, the identification would have been visually powerful and the image would've remained with the disciples. The Lord Himself clinches the connection by saying that whoever becomes as that child will be the greatest in the Kingdom- and He clearly was and is the greatest in the Kingdom (:4). Lk. 9:48 makes the connection beyond doubt in recording that the Lord then said that "Whosoever shall receive this child... receives Me". His subsequent comment there that "For he that is least among you all, the same is great" is surely a reference to Himself, rather than urging them to be the least so that they might be the greatest. The Lord's answer as to who was greatest in the Kingdom was therefore to indirectly point out that He is the greatest, and we should simply seek to be like Him, using the little child as a template to that end. The antidote to division, therefore, is to be focused upon Christ and to seek to simply enter the Kingdom- the things of the Kingdom and of the Name (Acts 8:12).

The Lord took a child and set him in the midst of those rough fishermen and tax collectors. He said that they must become like that child; and further, they must receive that child as a representative of Himself, and thereby, of God Himself. In probable allusion to this, Paul teaches that in malice we should be children, but in understanding: men (1 Cor. 14:20). The child in the midst of men, wide eyed, simple and sincere amidst men full of cynicism and human wisdom and self-righteousness and the gruffness of the flesh... This was a symbol of every true believer, of the Lord Himself, and of Almighty God, as they were and as they are in the midst of a world and even a brotherhood that, like the disciples, so often stares on uncomprehending. The aptness was not in the child's humility [if indeed a child can be humble], but in the purity of the innocence and sincerity and unassuming directness.

18:3- see on 13:15,16.
And said: Truly I say to you, except you turn and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven- This is all sober language, repeated quite soon afterwards (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17), indicating the degree to which the Lord saw the salvation of the disciples as being in doubt unless they were going to humble themselves, and quit their pride and the divisions which come from it.

There are levels of conversion, as exemplified in the life of Peter who was not totally 'converted' until he devoted himself to strengthening his brethren after his encounter with the Lord after the resurrection. The same Greek words for "become as" are used for the need to become as their Lord and Master (10:25). The focus was to be upon becoming as Christ, rather than seeking greatness amongst themselves. The idea of 'becoming' suggests a process- to become as Him was to be the thrust of Christian life.

18:4 *Whoever therefore shall humble himself*- This is the very language of the Lord Jesus on the cross; the hymn of Phil. 2 speaks of seven stages in the Lord's self-humiliation until He finally died "the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), and then the hymn speaks of seven stages of exaltation. This is yet another indication that the little child, the one who would be greatest in the Kingdom, was to be seen as representative of the Lord personally. The disciples had initially followed John the Baptist, and his message had been that men must be "brought low" (s.w. 'humble self'; Lk. 3:5). And yet they had clearly not grasped this, even though in chapters 12 and 13 the Lord seems to rejoice that they had responded to John in spirit and truth, unlike Israel generally. Such was His grace and positive feelings about His beloved. To humble oneself suggests conscious effort, and yet it is almost impossible to make ourselves more humble by our own act of the will, or by some self-instigated internal intellectual process. Paul speaks of how *God* humbled him (2 Cor. 12:21), and Peter speaks of humbling ourselves "under the mighty hand of God, that He

may exalt you" (1 Pet. 5:6). He is willing to humble those who wish to be humbled, and so the essence of self-humiliation is surely to appreciate that God is seeking to humble us, and to cooperate with this, allowing His mighty hand to humble us, rather than resisting the process. We need to daily carry this in mind- that today, God seeks to continue His process of humbling us, so that He might exalt us in His time.

So how, then, can we 'humble ourselves'? When Israel was a child... she was humble, as we should be after our spiritual rebirth at baptism. It is evidently not something natural; for it is a fruit of the spirit we must develop. It isn't a natural timidity or nervousness or shyness. By realising our own sinfulness, we will realise our condemnation, and thereby be 'brought down'. For we are condemned for our behaviour, but saved out of that condemnation. The exact, vast debt is reckoned up- before we are forgiven (Mt. 18). We have been invited through the Gospel to sit down in the Kingdom: "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. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 14:10-11). Humbling ourselves is therefore sitting down in the *lowest* place- not just a low place. Strictly, the Greek means 'the farthest' away from the Lord Jesus, who sits at the head of the table. Like Paul we must somehow get that deep and genuine apprehension that we are "chief of sinners"- and sit in the *lowest, farthest* place. This would mean that we 'each esteemed our brother better than ourselves to be', not in any naïve, meaningless way; not seeing strengths where they simply don't exist; but seeing him [or her] that way simply in comparison to our own lowness. Seeing others as higher than ourselves is a sure remedy for every case of ecclesial friction and division. So often pride develops from a worry about what others will think of us, a desire to be seen as acceptable and not unusual. It leads to a hyper-sensitivity regarding what others may be implying about us [I am verily guilty of this]. The humbled mind will not see things in these terms. *If only we would each, personally, learn this lesson, or at least grasp the truth and beauty and power of it*. The publican was so worried about his own position before God that he paid no attention, so we sense, to the hypocritical brother next to him: "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 man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for … he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:13-14). That sin-conscious man is an essay in self-humbling. This is why David sometimes parallels "the meek" and the repentant sinner (e.g. Ps. 25:8,9).
It seems to me that so often in His teaching, the Lord was speaking to and about Himself. We understand from Phil. 2:8 that on the cross, the Lord "humbled himself". He used just those words in speaking of how the greatest in the Kingdom, the one who would be the most highly exalted

(and He surely had Himself in view) was the one who would be the most servile in this life. His references to *becoming* as a servant He therefore spoke partly as exhortation to Himself (Mt. 18:4; 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). The Mt. 18:4 reference speaks of humbling oneself in terms of being converted and becoming like a little child. This was lived out by the Lord in His life and ultimately in His acceptance of the death of the cross. Yet this is what "conversion" is essentially about. In the same way as the Lord Jesus Himself had to be "converted" even at the very end of His life, to accept the awfulness of the crucifixion with an almost child-like simplicity (in some ways- e.g. His silence when surrounded by evil accusers, just like "the child in the midst"), so we too will pass through stages of 'conversion'. Note in passing that the same idea of the humble being exalted is used by the Lord in Lk. 18:14 with reference to how the humble man recognizes His own sinfulness. Whilst the Lord was sinless, perhaps part of His humiliation and taking on a servant-form involved His acceptance of the full horror of sin, and His willingness to bear it for our sakes.

Whilst humility isn't a natural characteristic of children, we are asked to take as it were a snapshot of that child in that situation, looking at the ground, pining away inside himself. The Lord said that the child had "humbled himself" (Mt. 18:4)- showing that He didn't see children as naturally humble. But as he stood (or sat, Mt. 18:2 Gk.) in the middle of the circle, the impishness and immature self-assertion was driven out, and in a moment the child was humbled. That child in that situation, the Lord said, represented the true disciple; and it represented Himself, the Lord of glory. It seems to me that the Lord was standing next to the child, identifying Himself with it, in the middle of the circle of disciples. *In the very same context, a few verses later* the Lord spoke of how He was *in the midst* of the disciples (Mt. 18:20). There is no doubt He saw that humbled child as the symbol of Himself, possibly implying that He Himself had been progressively humbled, from one level to another. Yet in Lk. 9:48, the Lord goes further: the child represents not only the believers and their Lord, but also *the Father* (Mt. 18:5; Lk. 9:48). The humble surroundings of the Lord's birth, the way the exalted Lord of life and glory appeared from the tomb dressed like a working man (whilst the Angels, far inferior, had shining white garments), the way during His life He spoke in such a way that reflected His lack of formal education (Jn. 7:15)- all this shows a humble, super-human Father. And His Son was and is the same. Indeed, Lk. 2:12 RV (cp. Is. 7:11,14) says that *the* sign would be that the Son of God would be laid in a cattle trough; this was to be the extraordinary indication that God Himself was involved in this wonderful birth.

As this little child- In *Against Celsus* 3.55, Origen defends Christianity against the allegation that it requires men to leave the world of men and go mix with women and children in “the washerwoman’s shop”-

presumably a house church Celsus knew. Lucian of Samosata even mocked Christianity as being largely comprised of children and "old hags called widows". Marcus Cornelius Fronto likewise mocked the way "children" [and by that term he would've referred to teenagers too] participated in the breaking of bread [*Octavius* 8-9]. The teaching of the Lord Jesus was attractive to children / young people. They like women were treated as of little worth; the Greco-Roman world considered that children had to be taught, and couldn't teach a man anything. But the Lord Jesus repeatedly set children up as examples of discipleship (Mk. 9:36,37; Lk. 9:47,48; as Heb. 12:5-9). So we can understand the appeal of early Christianity to young people, teenagers, especially girls. O.M. Bakke has written a fascinating study entitled *When Children Became People*. The thesis is that the teaching of Christianity gave disenfranchised people an identity and meaning as persons- women and slaves are obvious examples- but this also applied to children / young people. They too were disregarded as people in Mediterranean society; and yet in Christ they were given their value as people. In the house church setting, we can imagine how this happened. Celsus mocks how teenage boys go to Christian house churches to be taught by women- reflecting how attractive Christianity was for young people. Solomon's words: "I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in", i.e. to rule God's Kingdom (1 Kings 3:9) are alluded to in Mt. 18:3,4; become a child so you can rule the Kingdom; Christ was the greatest child as he will be the greatest ruler. This sets Solomon up as our example in this respect.

The same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven- Elsewhere the Lord taught that he who humbled himself would be "exalted" (Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14), a word which is used both about His 'lifting up' on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32 and His ascension to Heaven (Acts 2:33; 5:31; Eph. 4:8), with all the subsequent 'exaltation'. Again, we sense that He has Himself in mind here- He who made Himself the lowest, was to be lifted up both on the cross and to Heaven. Paul makes a telling allusion to this idea in saying that he has humbled himself, not so that *he* would be exalted, but so that the weak brethren in Corinth might be (2 Cor. 11:7). When Peter later preached that Jesus was 'the exalted one' (Acts 2:33; 5:31) he perceived finally what the Lord was driving at here- that *He* was the greatest, the most exalted one, because He had humbled himself the most. And therefore all argument about seniority or greatness amongst the body of Christ was therefore irrelevant and deeply inappropriate.

On at least four separate occasions, the Lord taught that he who *exalts* himself will be *abased*, and he who *humbles* [s.w. abases] himself will be exalted (23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14). This was clearly a major theme in His exposition of the Gospel of the Kingdom; this is what will happen when that Kingdom is established at His return. He paralleled conversion with humbling oneself (Mt. 18:3,4). The humble will be exalted, and the exalted humbled. Because this will happen, we

must *now* humble ourselves, so that then we might be exalted. The majority of references to humility in Scripture refer to humbling *oneself*; humility, hard as it is to define, is something consciously done, as an act of the will. Yet the Father confirms us in our efforts. The Lord *humbled himself* to die on the cross (Phil. 2), and yet the cross *humbled him* (Acts 8:33). If we don't humble *ourselves* now, then God will do this to us through the process of condemnation at the judgment. In this lies the insistent logic of humility. It was the logic Israel failed to comprehend... "When Israel was a child...". It is prophesied of those who will be condemned: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty [as Moses did in this life]. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Is. 2:10-12). "And the mean man shall be brought down, and the mighty man shall be humbled, and the eyes of the lofty shall be humbled: But the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in judgment" (Is. 5:15,16). There are many similar passages; the theme of 'bringing down' pride is a major one in the first half of Isaiah (2:17; 13:11; 25:5,12; 29:4; 32:19). They pave the way for the announcement that in man's response to the Gospel of Christ, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain" (Is. 40:4). By the hills of human pride being brought down, and the giving of confidence to those so low in the valleys of hopelessness and lack of self respect, there is a levelling of all those who respond to Christ. But more than this; in this lifting up of the hopeless and bringing down of the proud, there is a foretaste of what will happen in the future day of judgment. In essence, "we make the answer now" by whether or not we bring down our pride, or whether we summon the faith in God's grace and imputed righteousness to believe that we, who are nothing, are lifted up in His sight. "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low" (James 1:9-10).

18:5 *And whoever shall receive one such little child in my name receives me*- To not offend others we must "receive" them (Mt. 18:5). It is written of Jesus that when crowds of materialistic, fascinated people followed Him, "He received them, and spake unto them of the Kingdom" (Lk. 9:11). He didn't just turn round and read them a lecture about the Kingdom. "He *received* them". Presumably Luke means to reflect how he perceived something in the Lord's body language that was receiving of that crowd of peasants- whom we would likely have written off as just dumb groupies with no more than surface level interest. And we too must receive one another, even as the Lord has received us (Rom. 15:7)- and this includes receiving him who is even weak in the faith (Rom. 14:1). We

should be looking for every reason to receive and fellowship our brethren, rather than reasons not to.

The disciples would've had to open their closed circle to allow the child to enter. As the child settled down in the arms of the Lord Jesus, he was effectively added to the circle of disciples. Children were counted as non-persons in first century society, along with women, serious sinners, the mentally ill and lepers. The Lord is powerfully teaching that our attitude to such persons is our attitude to Him and therefore to God (Mk., Lk.). The challenge comes down to many of us too, who come from closed table communities. The Lord foresaw that to form a tight circle around Him was the natural response of those who followed Him, but He is saying that unless we open that circle, we are in danger of actually not having received Him at all. Our not receiving of such persons is going to make them stumble ("offend them"), and this warrants eternal condemnation. The Lord had bidden the disciples 'humble themselves', and now they are given an opportunity to do so- by 'receiving' amongst themselves, as one of them, into their circle, a little child. Opening our circle and accepting amongst us those who do not share (at least, at this time) our level of faith, understanding or even culture- this is indeed a humbling experience. All that is in us cries out to keep them excluded, and to keep our circle tightly closed against them. But the argument for a closed circle, or a closed table, is ultimately one which originates in pride and a refusal to humble self.

The little child was to be identified with the Lord Jesus personally. See on 18:2. To not receive the little ones is to not receive Jesus personally. The issue is of eternal importance, as the next verse emphasizes. We cannot simply go along with such rejections and refusal to receive others just because it is the policy of a church or fellowship to which we have belonged or grown up in. Social death and rejection by our brethren is nothing compared to the painful rejection at the last day which the Lord speaks of.

Mark inserts at this point the question about a man casting out demons although 'not following us' (Mk. 9:38-42). The Lord rebukes them for this and goes on to warn them about not offending little ones. In Matthew, that warning follows straight on from the teaching about the need to receive little ones- as if refusing to receive them is what makes them stumble. The case raised by the disciples, as it were in protest at His teaching about receiving little ones, was presumably one of John's disciples. Although they had a different spiritual culture, history and even doctrinal understanding, the Lord had earlier likened both His and John's disciples to children in the marketplace working in parallel, presenting the same message in different ways. They were admittedly immature in some ways and in parts of their doctrinal understanding, but the Lord is teaching that this is what made John's disciples "little ones", and they

must still be accepted. The Lord warns twice in that section in Mk. 9:38-42: "Forbid him not". This is the same as saying 'Receive him, do not forbid him from entering your circle'. It is the same word which the Lord will go on to use in Mt. 19:14 about not forbidding another group of "little children". The Jewish world was to be condemned exactly because they hindered or forbad [s.w.] men to enter the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52- see on 18:7 *Woe to the world*). Peter surely alludes to the Lord's teaching when reasoning: "Who can forbid water" that Gentiles be baptized (Acts 10:47). Refusing baptism to those not considered good, ready or mature enough is surely a way of forbidding and not receiving little ones.

18:6 *But whoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe in me to stumble*- Why the warning against offence, causing to stumble, in this context? The context so far in this chapter has been about the need for humility and not dividing against each other in jostling for seniority in the community of believers. Lk. 9:48 says that the Lord went further and urged the disciples to receive such children. Surely the connection is in the fact that refusing to receive little ones and divisions amongst believers are what cause little ones to stumble, hence Paul brackets together "divisions and offences" (Rom. 16:17). This is the sin of division- it causes little ones to stumble, and that is so true to observed experience in the body of Christ. Refusing to receive little ones and divisions over this matter have caused so many of the little ones to go away from Christ. Lk. 17:1,2 repeats the teaching about not offending little ones, and the Lord goes on to teach about the need for unlimited forgiveness of others. Not forgiving is a form of not receiving others, and this too can lead the person to stumble from the way.

The implication may be 'Even just one'. If 'just' one person is rejected by us, then we have not received Christ and condemnation awaits us. Each encounter we have with people is therefore of eternal moment and significance. We cannot hide behind any sense that 'generally' we are innocent on this matter; if just one is rejected by us, then the Lord's terrible picture of condemnation must loom large before our eyes. Of course we can in this life repent and seek to put things right with one we previously rejected. But for the rest of our days we need to live in quiet humility realizing that we should have been rejected, that we caused a little one to stumble from the way, and our salvation truly is by grace.

By "little ones *who believe in me*" the Lord was clarifying that He was not so much talking about the spiritual acceptance of children as the acceptance of believers in Him whom His disciples might consider spiritually immature or inappropriate for acceptance into their closed circle. This may well have reference to John’s disciples, whom the disciples were slow to accept, both in the Lord’s ministry and probably also in the early years of the church. In the parallel records, He saw those who “follow not us” as being “on our part”, not losing their reward, as

being the little ones who believed in Him; and He saw wisdom as being justified by *all* her children, be they His personal disciples or those of John (Mk. 9:38-41; Lk. 7:35). John's men had a wrong attitude to fellowship- they should have 'followed with' the disciples of Jesus; and it would seem their doctrinal understanding of the Holy Spirit was lacking, although not wrong (Acts 19:1-5). Indeed, they are called there "disciples", a term synonymous with all believers in Luke's writing. And the Lord too spoke in such an inclusive way towards them. No wonder His disciples had and have such difficulty grasping His inclusiveness and breadth of desire to fellowship and save.

It would be better for him that a great millstone should be hung about his neck and that he should be drowned in the depths of the sea- The very language of Babylon's judgments at the last day. The believer who makes another to stumble by not receiving them is therefore no better than Babylon, the archenemy of God and His true people. And Rev. 18:21 speaks of how *Babylon* shall be cast into the sea as a millstone- such 'believers' will at the last day face Babylon's judgments, they will be "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), sent back into it from the judgment seat of Christ to share the world's fate. Even though externally they had been so separate from the world, so separate that the refused to receive the "little ones". But this attitude is in fact a worldly attitude; by having it, we are showing that we are of the world.

A nice picture of the Lord's perception of the disciples is found in the way He said that the little boy who came to Him, responding to His call (Mt. 18:2) represented the "little ones" who believed in Him (Mt. 18:6). 'Little ones' is a title of the disciples in Zech. 13:7; Mt. 18:3; Jn. 21:5; and it is disciples not literal children who have Angels in Heaven (Mt. 18:10). The context in Mt. 18:11,12 speaks of the spiritually weak, implying the 'little ones' were spiritually little as well. Christ's talking to them while he knew they were asleep in Gethsemane and the gentle "sleep on now", spoken to them whilst they were asleep (Mk. 14:41,42), sounds as if He was consciously treating them as children- especially fitting, given their spiritually low state then. His father-like care for them is seen also in His promise in Jn. 14:18 RVmg. that He would not leave them "orphans", but He would come to them. The disciples were not orphans- because they had a true and real Father-figure, in the Lord Jesus. But the disciples were the Lord's children. John records in his Gospel only once how Jesus described His disciples at the Passover meal as "My little children" (Jn. 13:33). The Lord Jesus was acting as the father of the family, instructing his children as to meaning of the Passover. But the same phrase occurs seven times in 1 John. He had dwelt upon that phrase of the Lord's, and it clearly came to mean so much to him. Our child-father relationship with the Lord Jesus likewise needs sustained meditation. In this sense, the Lord Jesus was manifesting the Father, and thus leading the disciples to the Father through Him.

Drowning in the depth of the sea was a common figure for the condemnation of the wicked. And yet Mic. 7:19 had spoken of how the sins of the faithful in Judah would be cast into the depths of the sea and drowned like the Egyptians at the Red Sea. And yet individual condemnation is spoken of with the same metaphor. The meaning is surely that our sins will be condemned, and thus forgiven; but if we are not identified with our sins, then we shall not be. In this lies a strong basis for understanding Paul's introspection of Romans 7- clearly he recognizes his sins, but doesn't identify himself personally with them.

We rather than the Lord are the ones who in essence have demanded our condemnation; His judgment is merely reflecting our own choice. The idea of self-condemnation is perhaps behind the Lord's teaching in Mt. 18:6. If we offend one of His little ones, "it is profitable for [us] that a great millstone should be hanged around [our] neck, and that [we] should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (RV). This is the language of Babylon's future condemnation at the last day (Rev. 18:21). But how can such a condemnation be "profitable" for us? Remember that James teaches that in some things, we all offend someone (James 3:2). Maybe the Lord is saying: 'When you offend others, as you all do at times, then you're deserving of condemnation at the last day. But condemn yourselves for it, now, in this life; that will be profitable for you, and then you need not be condemned at the last day'. It's a sober thought, that deserves introspection. We all offend others- let's give James' words their full weight. And instead of going down the road of 'Yeah but it was after all *their* fault they allowed themselves to be offended...', let's just allow these Bible passages their obvious meaning. Our poor attitude to others at times shouts for our condemnation. And we need to recognize that, resolving to live life ever more sensitive to our colossal impact upon others.

18:7 *Woe to the world... the man*- CEV: "The world is in for trouble because of the way it causes people to sin". The *kosmos* in mind was surely the Jewish world [the word usually has this primary meaning in John's Gospel]. In this case "Woe to that man" would then be specifically addressed to the disciples; they were to take the warning to themselves each one, which is why the next verse speaks of the need for 'you' singular to do absolutely everything to avoid causing another to stumble. The Jewish religious system caused men to stumble, as the Lord often pointed out. Bu there would be an especial woe to the individuals who caused the stumbling, because for doing this they will be liable to personal condemnation. The Jewish world, the system, was to face the "Woe" of Divine judgment specifically because it made men stumble spiritually. That's what these words of Jesus seem to be saying, and His criticisms of that system recorded elsewhere would accord with that view- the 'Woes' He pronounces on the Jewish system in Mt. 23 particularly

focus on the damage that system did to people, and the barrier it became between God and man.

Because of temptations to stumble! For it is necessary that the temptations occur, but woe to that man through whom the temptation comes!- The Lord continues His theme of giving offence to others when He says: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! [The Lord must have said this after such careful introspection, knowing that He was the rock of offence to many, and that Jewry were to be 'offended' by Him]. *Wherefore* if thy hand or thy foot *makes you a cause of stumbling* [i.e. to others], cut them off…" or else you will be condemned (Mt. 18:7 Gk.). This is how important it is to search our lives and see what may cause others offence. And, in His relentless way, the Lord continues: "See that ye despise not one of these little ones" (Mt. 18:10), the little ones He has Himself just been so careful not to offend, by paying up His taxes. We offend people by 'despising' them. And, on and on and on, Jesus incisively takes His teaching further- in the parable of the shepherd who seeks the lost sheep.

To *not* seek others' salvation is to despise them. We may not think we are despiteful people. But effectively, in His eyes, we are…if we neglect to actively seek for their salvation until we find it. To not offend others is thus made parallel to seeking their salvation. And the shepherd seeking the lost sheep matches the man who plucks out his eye and cuts off his hand lest they offend others. So you see the parallels throughout Matthew 18:

Lest we offend them	Pay the temple tax, go fishing, make the effort
Lest we offend others and are cast into condemnation	Pluck out our eye, cut off our hands and feet
Lest we offend the little ones and are cast into the sea	Receive the little ones as if they are Christ, see the Christ in them
Don't despise others	Go out looking for the lost sheep with unlimited effort
Lest we are cast "to the tormentors"	Give unlimited forgiveness to your brother, try to "gain your brother"

The self-willed effort we must make to not offend our brother is quite something. Just imagine looking at yourself in the mirror, wedging your finger nails under your eye socket, and pulling out your eye. This is the conscious effort we must make not to offend, and thereby to save. It's really quite something. Note that the parallels tabled above show that to

not offend is to save. If we seek above all the salvation of others, then we will not offend them. We will, quite simply, *care for them* as the Lord cares for us.

18:8 *And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble*- Cause you to stumble. The context has spoken of not offending the little ones, and of the terrible condemnation awaiting those who cause others to stumble. There are two legitimate meanings of the words here. The idea could be 'If these things cause you to stumble others'; or, 'If these things cause you yourself to stumble'. But the ambiguity is surely intentional. If we make others to stumble then we have made ourselves stumble, for if we make others stumble out of the way to the Kingdom, then we shall not be there ourselves. The point is clear- we are to go to absolutely any length, paying any personal cost, in order not to cause stumbling to a little one.

Cut it off- I suggest the Lord is parodying the orthodox Jewish idea of cutting off members of the community in order to preserve the rest of the body of believers- an idea equally common today amongst some in the new Israel. The Lord is saying that in order to avoid personal condemnation, we are to cut off our own limbs if necessary- in order to avoid causing a little one to stumble. The cost of not causing the little ones to stumble is therefore very personal; because communities, both secular and religious, tend to cause little ones to stumble by their policies, it follows that individuals will pay a high price for stepping out of line by insisting that we will not cause them to stumble. The preceding verse has explained how "the world", the Jewish religious system of the Lord's time, the *ekklesia* of the day, lead others to stumble, and that individuals must take personal responsibility for this. In the same way as the whole system was destroyed in AD70, so personal condemnation at the last day awaits the individuals who make others stumble.

And throw it away- The Greek for "cut off" here is that translated 'hew down' in speaking of condemnation at the last day in Mt. 3:10; 7:19; Lk. 13:9; Rom. 11:22. The idea of 'casting' ["throw it"] is used about the casting of the rejected into condemnation at the last day (Mt. 3:10; 5:13,25,29; 7:19 and often). This is the language of latter day condemnation- and yet the Lord says that this is what we must do to those parts of our bodies which cause us to make little ones stumble. I believe that we have here the idea which James 3:2 is articulating more directly: "In many things we offend all". We are warned that if we offend / make others stumble, then we shall be condemned. James says that we all make others stumble in some way (and honest self-examination will reveal that to us). So, we all should be condemned. But we must

recognize and confess wherein we have done this, and condemn those parts of our lives which have done that- and cast them from us.

It is better for you to enter into life maimed or lame, rather than having two hands or two feet to be thrown into the perpetual fire- The lame, blind and maimed were those not acceptable for service in God's tabernacle (Lev. 21:18; Dt. 15:21; 2 Sam. 5:8). The Lord surely has this in mind. He seems to be saying that to avoid offending little ones, it is better to be unacceptable for priestly service now, and yet therefore enter God's Kingdom. The implication, therefore, is that by *not* being seen as fit for priestly service, we avoid offending little ones. The only interpretation which makes sense of this to me is that the Lord foresaw that by fellowshipping the little ones, we may well be excluded from public priestly service in the house of God in this life, because those running the show generally exclude those who think in terms of an open table. But that is a cheap price to pay for entering the Kingdom. And we will be miserable excluded from His Kingdom if we make others stumble by acting in such a way as merely keeps us in with the religious powers that be, that keeps us fit *in their sight* for service. And this again is absolutely true to observation in the body of Christ. Those who are inclusive of little ones tend to be sidelined from public service by those who are decision makers within the ecclesia. But that is a cheap price for entrance to the Kingdom.

It's better to limp into the Kingdom than be rejected for self-righteousness. Surely there is an invitation here to see the limping Jacob, walking away from the encounter with the Angel, as our role model. The personality we will be in the Kingdom will reflect the struggles we have personally endured in this life. Relationships in the Kingdom of God will reflect these. Thus those who had consciously chosen to be eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom are comforted that in the Kingdom they will be given a name and place in God's temple better than of children in this life (Is. 56:5). All the faithful will be given a name and place in the temple; so what especial consolation was this to those eunuchs? Surely the point is that the name (personality) they will then have will gloriously reflect the self-sacrifice and personal Biblical understanding which they went through in this life. This alone proves that the reward will be individual. The Lord's picture of men entering the Kingdom without limbs is surely making the same point (Mk. 9:47); the result of our self-sacrifice in this life will be reflected by the personality we have in the Kingdom. And there is evidence that the Man we follow will still bear in His body, throughout eternity, the marks of the crucifixion (Zech. 13:6; Rev. 5:6).

18:9 *And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it*

away- The idea has been pushed that this refers to sexual lust. But that is not the context here. The context is of our offending others, and how we should be willing to pay any price, no matter how awful for us, so that we do not do that. I suggested above that the allusion is to how the blind, maimed and lame could not enter the priesthood for public service. The Lord is saying that it is better to be out of public service in the community of believers, if it means upholding policies which make little ones stumble. In the *kosmos* or the *ekklesia* of His day, it was necessary to separate oneself personally from the damage to others which the system was doing. It's better to enter into the Kingdom not having had the honour of public priestly service in the community in this life, rather than to have that public honour and yet cause others to stumble, meaning we shall not enter the Kingdom. The idea of entering the Kingdom without an eye or limping doesn't necessarily mean that we shall eternally be like that. I suggest it means that we enter the Kingdom having not had those things in this life, and not having therefore had a public ministry. The Lord was speaking to the 12 disciples at this point, some of whom, Matthew (Levi) especially, could have had a priestly career. Or He could be making the point that they were not going to be able to ever be priests in the old system because of their inclusiveness- but they would be shepherds of the *new* Israel He was forming, as He goes on to explain in :12-14.

Mk. 9:43-47 spells out the details of the condemnation in laboured detail- if our eye offends, or causes us to offend others, then cut it off, for it is better to be without an eye in this life than to be condemned in Gehenna, where the worm and fire are 'eternal'. And this is repeated concerning the hand and foot. We read of eye, hand and foot together in only one other context- of "eye for eye... hand for hand, foot for foot" being the punishment for damaging a 'little one' within the womb of a woman (Ex. 21:24; Dt. 19:21). Nowhere else in Scripture do these three words occur together. By not receiving a little one, despising them and thus causing them to stumble, we are doing the equivalent of the Old Covenant sin of beating up a pregnant woman and causing handicap to the 'little one' within her. It could be that the Lord is saying that we can be responsible for damaging those who have not yet come to spiritual birth, to the point that if they are born, then they will be born with serious defects which are our fault. And such defects will have been the result of not receiving them, even in their immature state. Thus the table practice of the Lord was to accept people at His table at whatever stage of their spiritual growth or journey, even those not as yet born again, not yet converted, not yet repentant... in order to try to bring them to that point.

It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna- The Lord bid us cut off the hand or foot that offends, and thus enter into life halt...blind, rather than be

condemned in Gehenna (Mt. 18:8,9). It sounds as if ‘entering into life’ means entering into the Kingdom; and so it can do, for this clause is set as the antithesis for being condemned at the last day. Yet it is hard to imagine us entering the Kingdom somehow maimed, and in any case then we will not need to be without what causes temptation. The figure rings more true to our lives today; if we cut off our flesh *now*, we will live the rest of our mortal days somehow lacking what we could have had. In this case, we enter into life right now, insofar as we cut off the opportunities of the flesh. Jesus told another man that if he would enter into life, he must keep the commandments (Mt. 19:17). Insofar as he kept those commands, he would right now enter into life. We are entering into life, eternal life, right now!

The Lord Jesus spoke several times of taking up the cross and following Him. This is the life you have committed yourself to by baptism; you have at least tried to take up the cross. The full horror and shock of what He was saying doubtless registered more powerfully with the first century believers than with us. They would have seen men in the agony of approaching death carrying their crosses and then being nailed to them. And the Lord Jesus asked men to do this to themselves. Our takings up of the cross will result in damage- the plucked out eye, the cut off foot. And notice that the Lord says that we will enter lame into the eternal life, or enter the Kingdom with just one eye (Mk. 9:45-47). Surely this means that the effects of our self-sacrifice in this life will in fact be eternally evident in the life which is to come. The idea of *taking up* the cross suggests a conscious, decided willingness to take on board the life of self-crucifixion. Taking up the cross is therefore not just a passive acceptance of the trials of life. There's a radical in each of us, even if the years have mellowed it. The way to express it is surely through radical devotion to the Father's cause. On one hand, Jesus spoke to men as they were able to hear it, not as He was able to expound it. Yet on the other, He gave His radicalism free reign. The Sabbath miracles seem to have purposefully provoked the Jews. When He encouraged His men to rub the corn heads and eat them like peanuts as they walked through a field one Sabbath, He knew full well this was going to provoke confrontation. And he said what was anathema to the Jews: "The Law was made for man and not man for the Law". Where there is human need, the law can bend. This was a startling concept for a Jew. Jesus described the essence of His Kingdom as mustard seed, which was basically a weed. It was like a woman putting leaven [both symbols of impurity] into flour. Surely the Lord was trying to show that His message was not so Heavenly that it was unrelated to earthly life. It was real and relevant to the ordinary dirty business of life. The woman who have everything she had was noted by the Lord as His ideal devotee. He taught that it was preferable to rid oneself of an eye or a limb and to sacrifice sex if that is for us the price of entry into the Kingdom (Mk. 9:45-47). The parable of the man who built bigger barns taught that in some senses we should in His service like there's no

tomorrow. He expected His followers to respond immediately, to pay the price today rather than tomorrow, with no delay or procrastination. There is an emphasis in His teaching on immediacy of response, single-mindedness and unrestrained giving. This is radical stuff for 21st century people in the grip of manic materialism.

Gehenna was the ravine south of Jerusalem where 'little ones' had been sacrificed to Moloch (Jer. 7:31; 10:5,6; 39:35). So there is an appropriacy in this particular picture of condemnation. Those who stop others entering God's Kingdom and lead them to condemnation will share the same condemnation; what they did to others will be done to them.

18:10 *See you do not despise one of these little ones*- Paul uses the same word in one of his many allusions to the Gospels in 1 Cor. 11:22, where he warns that exclusive attitudes at the breaking of bread, even having 'another table' to ones despised brethren, was in fact despising the entire church of Christ. Our attitude to the little ones is our attitude to Him and thereby to the entire church or body of Christ. Elsewhere, the Lord uses this word for "despise" as counterpoint to loving; the opposite of loving is to despise (Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). He is forcing us to perceive that we either love little ones by accepting them, or we despise them. We of course would prefer to argue for some third way, whereby we are conveniently indifferent to some and accept others whom we consider on our moral and spiritual level. But those whom we do not love and accept, we effectively despise. That is the Lord's understanding. The Lord had warned His followers to "despise not" the 'little ones' (Mt. 18:10). Paul picks up this phrase in 1 Tim. 6:2 in warning servants not to despise their masters who were brethren; the implication that they were to treat those wealthy but perhaps not very spiritually mature masters as 'little ones', with all the patience this would require.

For I say to you, that in heaven their angels do always see the presence of my Father who is in heaven- The Greek could equally mean that they fully behold the face of the Father. The idea seems to be that the "little ones" are in fellowship with God, they are indeed represented in Heaven, they are 'before God', in His presence. And we should therefore not reject anyone who has relationship with God and in a spiritual sense is in His presence. This is the essence of John's teaching- that we cannot claim to have fellowship with the Father unless we fellowship His children, and if we do not fellowship His children, then we thereby break our relationship with the Father. It is seriously wrong, therefore, to admit on one hand that individuals are in fellowship with the Father, and yet refuse them fellowship.

The guardian Angels of Christ's "little ones", "do always behold the face of My Father in Heaven". There seem two options here:
- The Angels may be physically present with us on earth but also maintain

a presence in the 'court of Heaven', perhaps by means of another Angel there.
- A more likely explanation lies in the meaning of the word "behold" - 'to look to, be aware of, perceive, take heed'. Although physically present with us, the Angels are intensely aware of the face of God which they behold when assembled in the court of Heaven awaiting God's words of command. The "little ones" in the context are the spiritually weak- does this have something to do with their Angels being physically absent from them in Heaven?

18:11 *For the Son of Man came to save*- In the context, the point is that if *His* mission was to fellowship with and thereby save "the lost", then it should be ours. His method of saving the lost was to have table fellowship with them in order to try to lead them to repentance and salvation. All that is true of Him is to be true of us- we have the same mission and should use the same methods. And refusing to open our closed circle to the little ones is going right against that method.

Those which were lost- The Lord Himself was evidently very conscious of the inclusiveness of both male and female in His redemptive work. He came to save that [both male and female] which was lost (Mt. 18:11). He asked His people to follow Him in His cross carrying, and then told them to follow a *man* bearing a pitcher of water (doing woman's work)- probably a slave bearing water for the purification rites of Passover. In asking this He was requesting us to see in that man a symbol of Himself in His time of self-sacrifice. Yet the Lord saw Himself as a slave, a man doing woman's work, as the seed of the woman...surely the Lord had worked out in advance this wonderful blend of the genders in the figure He chose to represent Him. He spoke of leaving one's sister for His sake as being a sacrifice, whereas the contemporary culture would rarely have felt that way about a female relative. Jesus not only spoke to women publicly, but is even recorded as allowing a Gentile woman to change His mind (Mt. 15:22). This was unthinkable and shocking to contemporary society.

The sentence begins with "For…", connecting the "lost" with the "little ones". Following through the theme of this section, the lost, the little ones, the despised ones, will be won back and not stumbled by receiving them in table fellowship. This is the going out to seek the lost. The Lord's parables describe those He will save as the son who refused to go to work, but later went, sheepishly aware of his failure; the sheep that went away, i.e. those Christ came to save (Mt. 18:11) (a symbol of us all, Mt. 18:12 cp. Is. 53:6); the lost coin; the son who went away and sowed his wild oats, and then returned with his tail between his legs. Christ expects that we will fail, as grievously as those parables indicate. Yet we have somehow come to think that they refer either to our follies before baptism, or to those within our community who publicly disgrace

themselves. Yet they describe *all* the faithful. But is there that sense of contrition in us, really? Aren't we more like the elder brother, or the son who said "I go, Sir, but went not" (Mt. 21:30)?

18:12 *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray*- Of course we must use our freewill and repent, but the Lord in the parables of the lost coin and sheep likens us to things which *cannot* repent and are not repentant, and yet all the same are brought back by the Lord's endless searching and pastoral care. By all means compare this with Peter's comment that the Lord's exaltation was in order to give *repentance*, not just forgiveness, to God's people (Acts 5:31; 11:18 cp. 2 Tim. 2:25). This is the extent of His atonement for men; not only to enable forgiveness, but to show His matchless grace yet further in even granting *repentance* to men. In the light of this it remains open to question how much credit we can personally take for our repentance. Not all lost sinners will come back, but the Lord speaks as if He will search always, in every case, *until* they do. These hyperboles are all to teach the vast extent of His desire to win back the lost. In the light of this, who are we to start questioning whether or not a brother has actually repented, if he says he has and shows this to some extent?

Does he not...?- The answer is, No, he doesn't. This is the element of unreality in this parable. It seems there are such elements in all the parables, and they are there to signpost us to the essential point of the parable. The Lord’s parables all feature an element of unreality, which flags attention to His essential point. The shepherd who left the 99 and went after the lost one was an unusual shepherd. Common sense tells us that one should think of the good of the majority, not max out on the minority. We invest effort and resources in ways which will benefit the maximum number of people. But the Lord turned all that on its head. The heart that bleeds cannot disregard the minority, however small or stupid or irritating it or they may be. For people matter, and the heart that bleeds will bleed for every single one.

Leave the ninety nine- This may appear irresponsible. But it is in line with the Lord's grotesque language of cutting off body parts in order to avoid offending little ones. It's hyperbole to make a point- that the one little one or lost one is to have our maximum attention. I suggested above that the loss of body parts was an allusion to rendering themselves unfit for priestly service under the Old Covenant system. The Lord may be continuing the idea. Focusing on the little ones, the lost, may well lead to our being judged unfit for wider shepherding roles by those who are the power brokers within the human side of God's people on earth. But so be it. Lose that kudos, those roles. Focus on saving the lost. For that is what the Lord did, and thanks to that, we have been found and saved.

The idea of "leave" is ‘to send away’, and four times in this chapter alone is translated ‘forgive’ (Mt. 18:21,27,32,35). The same word is then found

in Mt. 19:14, where the disciples again forbid little ones and refuse to 'receive' them, and the Lord tells the disciples to 'suffer' those little ones to come to Him. The use of the word suggests that the disciples needed to 'forgive' their immaturity. The whole section is very thematic and it therefore seems unlikely that the repeated usage of this word is insignificant. Maybe the Lord is hinting that we should not waste energy on unforgiveness, but rather forgive even 99 sheep, and seek by all means to rescue / save / receive / not cause to stumble the one. It's as if unforgiveness towards others may lead the "one" to stumble. And that is indeed true to observed experience, because those who stumble are often full of stories from church life of where they encountered unforgiving attitudes towards others. The parable seems to be saying that if someone has been offended by the exclusion they experienced from the majority, then we are to forgive the majority and all the same do all we can to regain the lost. The closed circle of disciples who turned away the children from Jesus thus become the 99 sheep; the focus must be upon winning back those who have become lost. The parable teaches this in itself, because a sheep will only leave the flock if there has been some incident or situation between the flock and that sheep which mean that the flock has rejected or excommunicated it. For sheep do not just wander off alone from the flock and get lost. They tend to stay together by nature.

On the mountains- The Old Testament is clear that the sheep of God's people were lost on the mountains because of poor shepherding (2 Chron. 18:16; Jer. 50:6; Ez. 34:6). The language of 'going astray' fits this picture, because the Greek word essentially means 'to be deceived' and is used in the context of the Jewish religious leaders deceiving ordinary Jewish people in the first century (Mt. 24:4; Gal. 6:7; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26). The mission of the disciples was to take over the role of the shepherds; they were resigning from the chance of being shepherds under the Old Covenant, disqualifying themselves from priestly service by cutting off their limbs, leaving the shepherding of the 99- but thereby becoming the shepherds of the New Covenant.

We all have the desire to keep our faith to ourselves, to hold onto it personally on our own little island... and it was this attitude which the Lord so repeatedly and trenchantly criticized. And in his demanding way, he implied that a failure in this would cost us the Kingdom. He more than any other must have known the desire for a desert island spiritual life; but instead he left the 99 righteous and went up into the mountains (i.e. he prayed intensely, after the pattern of Moses for Israel?), in order to find the lost sheep (Mt. 18:12).

And go in search of the one that went astray?- We are all such sheep who have gone astray (1 Pet. 2:25 s.w.). We are to replicate what the Lord did for us, in seeking the lost. But it is only if we perceive the degree to which we really were "astray" that we will be motivated to use His methods to

likewise save others. This is especially difficult to achieve for those raised in believing homes, who were schooled into Christ from an early age. The lost sheep who leaves the fold and goes off is based on Ps. 119:176: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments". The lost sheep that is found therefore has the attitude of recognizing it is lost, that it is still the servant of the shepherd although isolated from him, and still has not forgotten the things of God's word. The picture in Ps. 119:176 is strange indeed: a lost sheep asking the shepherd to come and find him. It's as if the sheep talks to himself, feeling the shepherd can't and won't hear, feeling that he's just too far away. And this is *exactly, exactly* the position of all those who leave the faith and return: they don't forget the doctrines of the Truth, in their hearts they feel too far away, but they wish somehow something could happen to get them back. This explains the type of sheep one is dealing with in the parable, and why the parable isn't true of all who go astray.

18:13 *And if he finds it*- Although in other parables the Lord is presented as searching *until* He finds the lost sheep, there is the possibility that He will not find it. Such is the huge power the Father has given human freewill.

Truly I say to you, he rejoices over it- The same word used for the man of Lk. 15:5 rejoicing in finding his lost sheep, and the Father's rejoicing at the return of the prodigal (Lk. 15:32). The time of rejoicing is at the day of judgment, when sower and reaper shall "rejoice together" when the fruit is gathered unto life eternal (Jn. 4:36 s.w.). The rejoicing is when the sheep is 'found', and whilst that can happen in a sense in this life, the ultimate 'finding' of the sheep is surely at the final change of nature when Christ returns. Our joy at the day of judgment will not simply be because of our own personal salvation, but because of how others are receiving that great salvation, in part thanks to the efforts we made for them in this life. Paul's "crown of rejoicing" would be to see his converts accepted in that day (1 Thess. 2:19).

More than over the ninety-nine that never went astray- We could read this as meaning 'who did not *think* they went astray', seeing that all the Lord's sheep go astray. In this case, the reference might be to the majority of Israel; the Lord was saying that His disciples were to go searching for the little ones, the children, the women, lepers, whores and gamblers, and forgive or not worry about the masses of Israel who didn't consider they needed repentance. Or this could simply be the element of unreality in the story- the 99 simply function as part of the furniture of the parable, to focus our attention upon the proactive effort we should be making to win back the lost. And this huge effort stands in contrast to the negative attitude of the disciples in not 'receiving' the little ones.

18:14 *So it is not the wish*- It is not the Father's *will* that little ones should "perish" (see too Jn. 6:39 s.w.), but :13 has made it clear that the

finding of the lost is conditional: "*If so be* that he find it". Such is the huge power delegated to us, the extent of human freewill- that it can even stop the will of God being fulfilled. Because we have a choice as to whether we do His will or not.

Of your Father who is in heaven- RVmg.: "It is not a thing willed before your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" seems to refer to the guardian Angels who represent the "little ones" before the court of Heaven. Every situation in which we reject the little ones is played out in the court of Heaven. This section began with the disciples thinking that their internal politics could somehow be hidden from the Lord (see on :1 and :2). They cannot be. The situations, discussions, rejections, formulations of policies, inward thoughts… are all played out before the throne of God in Heaven.

That one of these little ones- This serves to show that the lost sheep are the same as the little ones.

Should perish- The Son of God came to "save that which is *lost*" (:11- s.w. "perish"). His mission was indeed the doing of God's will- that little ones should not "perish" or be "lost". But it's possible that they will be- because we can make them stumble, make them perish, even though it is the will of the Father and Son that they do not perish. The Lord gave His life so that they would not be lost / perish (Jn. 3:15,16 s.w.). But we can fight against the intention of the cross by making them stumble and thereby perish. The same word is used for how we can make a believer stumble and they thereby "perish": "Don't destroy [s.w. "perish"] with your [attitude to] food him for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15). By doing so we are making the cross of Christ of no power for that person. Exactly the same is said in 1 Cor. 8:11, and I think 2 Jn. 8 has the same idea: "Look to yourselves, that we don't make to perish [s.w.] those things we worked for"- and those things were surely the converts which John's community had converted and built up.

18:15 *And*- AV "Moreover". Thus the previous theme is continued. Having spoken of such radical inclusiveness, the Lord foresees and tackles the obvious objection- that there may be cases where a believer has sinned against us, and that, surely, would be a reason for exclusion from the circle of disciples. But of course that would be illogical- if we are to be open to the little ones coming into the circle, then once they are within it, it would make no sense to then throw them out of it because they sinned against us. And the Lord now spells that out clearly.

If your brother sins against you- Luke's record adds: "*Take heed to yourselves*; if your brother trespass... forgive him" (Lk. 17:3). This is alluded to in Acts 20:28, where Paul says we should *take heed* of the likelihood of false teachers. Surely what he's saying is 'Yes, take heed to

forgive your brother personal offences, take heed because you'll be tempted *not* to forgive him; but have the same level of watchfulness for false teaching'. On another level, "take heed" suggests that in the case of personal offence, the tendency may be not to actually talk to your brother about it, nor to consciously forgive him in your heart. And it is these undealt with issues which create so much damage, both to us and to others. The purpose of the process outlined here is *not just* for the sake of the brother who has erred, it isn't just a polite protocol to follow; it is for *our sake too*, who have seen the weakness of our brother. *Unless* we talk frankly to him about it, between us *alone*, then we will end up hating him in our heart (even though it may not feel like that) and we will gossip about him. The frank raising of the issue with our brother is associated with loving our neighbour as ourselves. This is actually the opposite to what we would think; we would imagine that it would be more 'loving' to say nothing to our brother. But in this case, we will inevitably gossip about him and be bitter against him. The practice of true love will result in an open community in which we can frankly discuss with each other the issues which concern us, with love and not hatred in our hearts. This is the teaching of Lev. 19:16-18. No wonder the Proverbs expand upon it so much. And no wonder the Lord appropriated it as a ground rule for His ecclesia- there must be no gossip in the church. See on 5:22.

"Trespass" is the same word translated "sin" in 18:21 where Peter alludes back to these words and asks how many times his brother can "sin" [s.w. "trespass"] against him and be forgiven. The Lord's answer is basically 'An unlimited number of times', which indicates that Peter is to forgive without analysing the integrity of the supposed repentance. Luke's record in Lk. 17:3,4 could suggest (if read in isolation from the context) that the sinning brother should only be forgiven if he repents. But the way the Lord clarifies this to Peter effectively offers a far higher level of response to the brother's sin. If he is to be forgiven multiple times for the same sin, even the same day, and if the genuineness of his repentance is irrelevant- then in practice the Lord is teaching to forgive without requiring repentance. The lower level is to forgive only upon repentance; but the only problem with that is that as we behave in this matter, so we shall be dealt with by the Lord. In the Lord's prayer we are taught to ask for forgiveness *as* we forgive others. It's therefore important for us to be as generous as possible in forgiveness. As so often in spiritual life, taking the lower and easier path (in this case, forgiving only if we receive repentance first) creates a far harder situation for us- in this context, only being forgiven ourselves if we consciously repent of absolutely every sin. Not for us, therefore, could be David's prayer to be forgiven for his "secret faults" (Ps. 19:12), those that were secret or hidden from himself.

This whole section about 'taking matters up' with our brother and forgiving upon repentance (Lk. 17:3,4) seems out of step with the spirit of the material which precedes it (about doing absolutely anything to

receive our weak brother), and with that which follows it (the teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of repentance). I suggest it is purposefully out of step with it, and is in fact an allusion to and parody of synagogue disciplinary rules; it is certainly alluding to the procedure for disciple mentioned in the Qumran documents as being practiced in the Qumran community (1 QS [Rule of the Community] 5:24-26; CD [The Damascus Document] 7:2; 9:8). The synagogues had a disciplinary sanction of *Niddui*, casting out with no further association, and it would seem clear that the Lord is alluding to this when He speaks of making the disciplined brother as a Gentile and publican. There is evidence that later Christian excommunication was called "the judgment of the Jew", so clear was the Judaistic basis for the later Christian practice of excommunication (Lawrence Frizzell, 'Excommunication', in E. Kessler and N. Wenborn, *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2005) p. 152; see too G. Forkman, *The Limits of the Religious Community. Expulsion from the Religious Community within the Qumran Sect, within Rabbinic Judaism and within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: Gleerup, 1972)). This kind of parody of the language and practices of Judaism is common on the Lord's lips, and I have mentioned such cases throughout this exposition. This would explain the way that He goes on to assume there is some kind of established meeting with a congregation, witnesses etc. Admittedly He uses the word *ekklesia*, often translated "church", instead of synagogue, but the synagogue was the *ekklesia* for the very first disciples (we note how the early ecclesia is called a "synagogue" in James 2:2, and early Christian writers like Ignatius and Hermas likewise call the church a "synagogue"). When recounting Old Testament history and quoting from the Old Testament, Josephus at least nine times replaces the LXX *sunagoge* with *ekklesia* (F.J.A.Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan, 1898) p. 7). *Ekklesia* as a word doesn't have any religious connotation. And strictly speaking, the *ekklesia* was not so much the body of believers or synagogue as the called-together assembly of the members at a specific time and place, which in the synagogue context ratified disciplinary decisions. The word developed into meaning 'the church' generally in the later New Testament, but initially it meant a specific local gathering of called individuals at one place and time, and had no universal sense to it. There was no established Christian congregation at the time the Lord was speaking, and yet He speaks as if such a system was well known by the disciples. Hort comments on the use of *ekklesia* in Mt. 18:17: "The actual precept is hardly intelligible if the *ekklesia* meant is not the Jewish community, apparently the Jewish local community, to which the injured person and the offender both belonged" (Hort, *ibid.*, p. 10). To therefore follow this section to the letter in *church* life today may be totally missing the point, and acting as the synagogue did- rather than as did the ever forgiving Lord of unconditional 'receiving' of little ones, sinners, the lost etc. This is only a suggestion- my notes on the passage don't always assume that this is the only interpretation.

Go show him his fault- The Greek word carries the sense of convicting a person, persuading them; it carries with it the hope of success. It's not a case of merely telling a person that we have noticed their faults, it is an attempt to convict a person of them with a view to their positively changing. The Lord uses the word later when He comments that He does this in love and hope of reformation: "As many as I love I rebuke [s.w. 'tell a fault' here] and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

Between you and him alone- This is so difficult! We would far rather notice the fault and tell others about it. This teaching is likely one of the most disobeyed principles of the Lord. The sense of being alone together is supported by the command to "*go* and tell him his fault… alone". The command to "go" and tell him he fault would seem a mere literary flourish until we perceive that *hupago* means not simply 'to go', but to go away, to depart. We are to depart from the time and place of realization of the offence against us, and then *alone* with the brother, attempt to convict him of a better way.

If he hears you, you have gained your brother- The question arises as to whether the gaining / regaining of the brother is to us personally, or to God. It *could* mean that personal regaining of relationship is in view. But the word translated 'gain' is elsewhere used about gaining or regaining a person *to God* (1 Cor. 9:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:1), and the word is repeatedly used in the parable of the talents, whereby the servants 'gain' more talents *for their Master* (Mt. 25:17,20,22). In practice, this surely refers to gaining *people* for Him. The two are of course related, because to gain a brother for the Lord is to gain a brother for ourselves.

Here the Lord says of a sinful brother: "If your brother sins… go and point out the fault… if he listens to you, you have [re]gained your brother". But in Lk. 17:3, He says: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him". This would parallel the brother's 'repentance' with him 'listening' to you. Seeing repentance is a state of the heart, and we simply can't know the hearts of others, it seems to me practically impossible to judge the level of another's repentance. The Greek and Hebrew words translated 'repentance' strictly mean a change of mind, and not necessarily any works / actions. God in this sense can 'repent'. It seems to me that we have to recognize a changed state of heart in our repentant brother, without demanding 'works'.

18:16 *But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two others, that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established*- The principles of Mt. 18:16,17 concerning dealing with personal offences are applied by Paul to dealing with moral and doctrinal problems at Corinth (= 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Cor. 5:4,5,9; 6:1-6). The context is indeed of personal offences, but as with all Scripture, we are not using it out of context if we extract the principles and apply them in different contexts.

The “two or three witnesses” were required in order to execute someone under the Mosaic law (Dt. 17:6; 19:15; Heb. 10:28); having ‘witnesses’ was very important to the Jews in the way they operated their judicial thinking (Mt. 26:65; Acts 6:13; 7:58). Surely the Lord didn’t intend His new Israel to as it were re-enact the death penalty by excluding someone from the community if they personally offended you, didn’t repent and therefore were unforgiven by you? That would be absolutely in conflict with His teaching which surrounds this section. This kind of legalistic, judgmental approach, and the need to establish “every word”, seems so out of step with the radical grace, acceptance, patience, forgiveness without repentance and non-judgmental of the preceding and subsequent teachings of Jesus. The sharp difference in tone confirms me in thinking that the Lord here is not merely speaking tongue in cheek, but is parodying synagogue disciplinary procedures, as suggested on 18:15.

18:17 *And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church*- I have suggested in commentary on :15 and :16 that the allusion is to the synagogue methods of discipline, rather than to the church of Christ which had not then been established. There is no hint that this procedure was intended for application in the future, after the church was established. Greek tenses are specific, and this could have easily been conveyed. But it isn’t; indeed, the whole procedure is spoken of as if it were already in existence and was what those offended by their brother could do right away.

And if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you- It seems that we have here a case of the Lord offering a concession to human weakness, to live His Truth on different levels. For the parable of the lost sheep shows Christ never giving up; but then there is the teaching of :15-18 concerning us trying to gain the brother that has offended us (Mt. 18:15 = Prov. 18:19), resulting in finally throwing him out of the church if we fail to reach an understanding with him. The teaching here seems to be that it is legitimate in such a case of personal offence to give up with the brother and separate from him. But the preceding parable shows Christ saying that He never gives up. And then in :22 Christ tells Peter (“I say unto *thee*", singular) never to stop forgiving his brother in a case of personal offence, up to 70 times seven. My summary of all this is that the ideal standard is never to give up in trying to regain our brother; but it is possible to live on the level of 'taking up' every issue with him, and eventually parting from him. 'But', the Lord continued, 'For you Peter, I expect a higher level; constant forgiveness of your brother, all day long!'.

If your brother sins against you, you can go to him, then get the church involved, and then, the Lord says to the person sinned against, let him be unto “thee” as a Gentile / publican. About the only advantage from the KJV is the way 'thee' signifies a 'you singular' as opposed to 'ye / you' which in KJV English meant 'you plural'. Modern English no longer makes

a distinction. So, let such a person be unto *thee*- you singular, not your ecclesia- as a Gentile and Publican. And what was Jesus' attitude to them? To mix with them, eat with them in table fellowship, and try to win them. Clearly this is talking about personal relationships, not ecclesial disfellowship.

As the Gentile and the tax collectors- The Lord's attitude to Gentiles was so different to that of religious Jews. He ate with them, thereby sharing religious fellowship; spoke positively of them, healed them and looked forward to the way that His death would end the spiritual status difference between Jew and Gentile; and therefore the Lord acted as if it were effectively ended anyway. The intention of 'being as a Gentile' was surely that it meant 'Have nothing to do with him'. But the Lord *did* have much to do with Gentiles, and by implication He did not think that the Jewish religious attitude to them was correct. Surely He is alluding here to Jewish 'disfellowship' practices, speaking tongue in cheek. For are we to really imagine Him now teaching that we are to only forgive our brother if he repents, and if we feel he has done wrong to us, drag him through a whole procedure of meetings and then declare him 'a Gentile', one not to be associated with? Surely not.

Matthew, the human author of this Gospel, had been a "tax collector" (10:3). The Lord did not ignore publicans as the religious Jews did; He had shocked the Jews by eating / fellowshipping with publicans (9:10,11). So the command to treat someone whom you won't forgive because they haven't repented (Lk. 17:3,4) as if they are a publican makes little sense if this is what Jesus is personally commanding us. Because He had taught by example that we should share religious fellowship with publicans, and He looked forward to sharing eternity with them (21:31,32)! It seems therefore almost certain that He is simply re-stating the well known procedures for disfellowshipping someone from the synagogue. The Lord is surely teaching that unless we practice radical acceptance and forgiveness of others, then we will end up disfellowshipping the little ones rather than receiving them. It would be fair enough to conclude the translation of each verse in Mt. 18:15-17 with a question mark- as if to say, 'Is this *really* how you want to carry on, endlessly taking up issues with your brethren, initiating procedures against them and then refusing to receive them at your meetings?'. The sense here in :17 would then be 'If he won't hear your witnesses- what, tell it to the church? And if he doesn't hear the church- make him to you as a Gentile and publican?'.

How we treat each other should be a reflection of how God treats us. We can make concessions for each other's weaknesses, accepting that some will live on higher levels than others; or we can demand a rigid standard of spirituality from them. I would venture to say that neither of these attitudes are *morally* wrong in themselves; it's just that as we judge, so we will be judged. For some time I have struggled with Matthew 18. It's a

chapter all about forgiveness, of forgiving until 70 times 7, of never giving up our search for the lost sheep; *of being soft as shy children in dealing with each other* (a matchless, powerful analogy if ever there was one). But wedged in the middle of the chapter is this passage which says that if your brother personally offends you, go to him and ensure that he sorts it out; and if he doesn't, take someone else with you, then tell the other believers about him, and throw him out of the church. This always seemed to me rather out of context in that chapter. But there must be a point behind the paradox presented here. Perhaps it's something along these lines: 'If your brother offends you, you are quite justified in 'taking it up' with him, demanding he acknowledge his wrong, and eventually expelling him from the church. But- why not just forgive him, without demanding an apology from him?'.

18:18 *Truly I say to you: Whatever things you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever things you shall release on earth shall be released in heaven-* 'Binding' is associated with the binding of the rejected in condemnation at the last day (Mt. 13:30; 22:13; Rev. 20:2). The idea of binding and loosing occurs here in the context of warning us not to be too hasty to cast a brother out of the ecclesia. The earlier context of this section is of not causing others to stumble. It doesn't mean that any ecclesial decision has God's automatic sanction. But because salvation is related to remaining in the Christ body, the Lord may be saying: 'By unnecessarily expelling someone from association with My people, not 'receiving' them, you are endangering their salvation. I won't necessarily come to their rescue; I have delegated the keeping of that brother to you. You are your brother's keeper. If you throw them out, they will probably lose their salvation. What you do on earth in these decisions is not necessarily overridden by Heaven. The eternal saving of a man is delegated to his brethren, and therefore you also have the possibility of causing him to stumble from salvation'. The implication of this is surely that we should only cast out of the ecclesia those who openly and beyond doubt have placed themselves outside of God's salvation- and we cannot judge whether they have or not. And the Lord surely meant us to compare this against His command not to judge. He is surely saying in this passage: 'You can argue it out with your brother, and eventually get the ecclesia to disfellowship him. But by this you'll be saying that he is out of the way of salvation, and what you do may well drive him to condemnation; for it's a hard and unlikely way to the Kingdom without your brethren. And you know that you mustn't condemn him. So better just forgive him, 490 times / day, unconditionally'. Paul takes this idea seriously when he says that if he forgives anybody, he does it "in the person of Christ", and so, by extension, the church at Corinth did too, seeing they were partakers in that same one body of His (2 Cor. 2:10).

Another approach is suggested by the consideration that the Greek words for binding and loosing, along with their derivative words, are often used

in the NT for binding in prison, and loosing from prison's bonds. In this case, as in 16:19, the Lord may simply have the idea that through the power of the Gospel (16:19) and through forgiving and receiving sinners (here in chapter 18), we have the power to loose people. The "keys of the Kingdom" are in our hands. And if we don't do that, then we effectively bind them. And God ["Heaven"] will not as it were come rushing in to change things. He has given us genuine freewill, which means that our decisions with regard to others have significances which He doesn't necessarily mitigate. For otherwise, human behaviour would lose meaning and ultimate significance.

We should note that here the language of "the keys of the Kingdom" used in 16:19 to Peter specifically is now repeated to all the disciples. It is not so that Peter was given some unique power which the others were not.

18:19 *Again I say to you, that if two of you*- Surely to be connected with the "two or three witnesses" of :16, and the "two or three" of :20- see note there. The idea may be that in your decisions about how far to go in 'receiving' a little one, you will be confirmed in that decision by Heaven. Or the sense may be that seeing the little ones should be 'received' without limit, if the group of you making the decision pray for strength to do that, then it will be granted.

Shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask- The Bible nowhere offers such a blank cheque assurance that literally whatever we ask for we shall receive. Always there is a specific context to such assurances that prayer will definitely be answered and requests given. That specific context here is concerning not offending others, efforts in winning them back and receiving them. We note that this is foreseen as a collective activity, involving more than you- because decisions regarding fellowship involve at least two or three.

It shall be done for them by- An allusion to the saying of 'Amen', so be it, may it be done. Your 'Amen' will in this case surely come true. Some of the assurances that prayer will surely be answered are in the context of praying for others. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them" is in the context of concerned brethren trying to win back a weak brother. Likewise "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us... if any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 Jn. 5:14-16). Again in a forgiveness context, Solomon asked that God would hear Israel "in all that they call unto thee for" (1 Kings 8:52).

My Father who is in Heaven- The whole section emphasizes how God in Heaven is intensely involved with what we are doing on earth with regard to these decisions about excluding or including others (see :10,14,18,20).

18:20- see on 18:4.
For where two or three- This obviously connects with the two or three witnesses just mentioned in :16. There the Lord had said that if you won't unconditionally forgive your brother, then before two or three witnesses you can disfellowship him. I suggested that this was said tongue in cheek, for the Lord's intention in the surrounding context is that we should unconditionally forgive. But if we choose not to, then we can take this lower level of responding to sin against us. But He warns that we take this decision with Him in the midst of us, very much present. He has made this point in other language when reminding us that the representative Angels of the sinner are in God's presence in the court of Heaven, and what we do, how we decide, is being played out in the very presence of God. This saying about His presence in the mist of the "two or three" is saying the same thing. This evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the Divine presence [*shekinah*] rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be. Surely the hint is that if we agree together to show grace and acceptance to a little one, then this is the outcome of the true study of Torah. But whatever decision we come to regarding issues of forgiveness, acceptance and exclusion of others, we must accept the Lord's laboured and sober warnings that we are taking them in the very presence of the Father and Son. And we must recall how this whole section begins in 18:1,2 with the disciples thinking that their strivings against each other were somehow hid from their Lord- when He knew exactly what the thoughts of their hearts were about these things.

The personal presence of Jesus amongst us when gathered may suggest that He is especially manifested / revealed in the gathered together groups of believers, in a special and far different way to which an isolated believer reading a Bible may know the presence of Jesus. All this must especially be true of the breaking of bread- the only other time in the New Testament we meet the three Greek words translated "I am in the midst" is in Lk. 22:27, where the Lord comments how He is in the midst of the disciples at the first breaking of bread. Of course, mere church attendance doesn't mean we perceive Christ there, in the midst of us; we perceive Him there insofar as we perceive the spirit of Christ in our brethren. The context is of two or three being gathered together in united prayer and receiving the answer. Receiving the gift of answered prayer is paralleled with the personal presence of Jesus in their midst. Answered prayer is part of His presence with us. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" surely promises a special closeness of Christ when we are physically gathered together. All those who have made real effort to gather together for the memorial meeting will know the truth of this. Our community increasingly features many in semi-isolation; this promise of special spiritual blessing in meeting

together is something which they can and surely *do* know the truth of. The close fellowship which was engendered by the Passover feast, as Israel huddled together in family units around the slain lamb, the focus of their love and gratitude to God, explains why Israel were repeatedly warned not to share that meal with those not in covenant with God. However this cannot mean that the presence of Christ is *only* available if two or three physically gather together, and that He does not tabernacle in the individual. We could also read the clause as meaning that if two or three gather in His Name, this is because of Him being in their midst; i.e. unity, gathering together, is only possible around the person and presence of Christ.

Are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them- Literally, 'synagogued'. I have suggested above that the Lord is parodying the process of synagogue discipline, and teaching that His followers should not follow that but rather unconditionally accept the little ones. By doing so, they would no longer in practice be able to be part of the synagogue structure, which was based around excluding rather than including. I would read the Lord here as yet once again teaching that He is establishing a new Israel; the new synagogues would be comprised of twos and threes of secular but sincere believers earnestly praying together that the lost might be found, for forgiveness for those who have sinned against them without repentance.

18:21 *Then Peter came and said to him: Lord*- Peter asked: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?". Jesus responds with a parable in which a man who calls his king "Lord" is himself forgiven, but refuses to forgive another man. Surely that parable was specifically for Peter, the one who delighted to know Jesus as Lord. He was warned through the parable that calling Him 'Lord' wasn't enough. An appreciation of Him as Lord of his life would mean quite naturally that he had a spirit of frank forgiveness for his brother, not carefully measuring it out, but rather reflecting his Lord's forgiveness of him. If Jesus is really Lord, then everything which He does and all that He shows becomes an imperative for us to follow.

How often- Jesus replies, 70 x 7. i.e. to an unlimited extent, even when the repentance is obviously insincere. It's as if He's saying that yes you can go through the procedure of sorting it out with your brother and rejecting him from your personal company. But, the higher level, is to simply forgive him. It's like adultery under the Law. There were several options for the husband. Do a trial of jealousy and make her infertile. Stone her. Divorce her. Or, just forgive her. We surely all ought to be aiming for the higher level. Those who quote Matthew 18 as a reason for withdrawal are in my view living on a lower spiritual level than those who forgive 70 x 7. But the gracious Lord doubtless shall accept them too in the last day.

Shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?- The Lord's comment that "If your brother shall trespass against you" (:15- see notes there) is picked up here by Peter. The Lord's reply was that Peter should forgive his brother to an unlimited extent, each and every day. It seems to me that the Lord was saying that the 'one-two-out' attitude which He had just described was very much the lower level of response, the way of the Jewish synagogues; He wished His followers to take the higher level, of unconditional forgiveness. Indeed, the whole passage where He speaks about going to see your brother and then telling the church is wedged in between His teachings about grace and forgiveness. It's so out of place that one wonders whether He wasn't saying it very tongue in cheek, in allusion to the synagogue discipline methods. At the very least, He seems to intend the contrast between His surrounding words and those about 'one-two-out' to sink in, to the point that we realize, as He told Peter, that there is indeed a higher way.

Until seven times- Lk. 17:4 adds "in a day". Perhaps Peter had in mind how Jacob bowed seven times to Esau and was forgiven (Gen. 33:3), or perhaps he had wondered whether the sprinkling of blood seven times in the Mosaic rituals spoke of forgiveness of a maximum of seven sins in one day, as some Rabbis taught (Lev. 4:6,17; 8:11; 14:7,51; 16:14,19; Num. 19:4). Or perhaps Prov. 24:16 was another source for his thinking- "a just man falls seven times and rises up again". The Lord's answer was that we need to forgive far more than seven times because we too sin far more than seven times / day- which is the function of the hopelessly indebted servant in the following parable. Peter's phrase "*until* seven times" is strangely lifted right out of Dan. 4:23, where Nebuchadnezzar was to be punished "until seven times" passed over him. Peter often alludes to Old Testament scripture in his recorded speech; he was very Bible-minded. He may have been suggesting 'Even if someone's as bad as Gentile Nebuchadnezzar, we should still forgive them, I suppose, but that surely is the limit'. But the Lord's subsequent comment about 70 sevens is from the prophecy of Daniel 9 regarding the far longer "times" which were to pass over Israel for their sin. So His comeback on Peter's clever allusion was: 'No, Peter. Don't forgive people "till seven times", as much as God did Gentile king Nebuchadnezzar- but as much as God forgave *Israel*, which was an infinite amount, 70 times, more than that!'. Such level of dialogue with Peter would've been perfectly possible and normal, for he really knew and loved the Old Testament and was quite the amateur Bible student- see 'Peter: Bible Student' in my *Peter and Paul* (Sydney: Aletheia, 2008). See on 18:27 *Forgave him the debt*.

18:22- see on :15.
Jesus said to him: I do not say to you until seven times, but until seventy times seven- The Lord's command to forgive 490 times per day (Lk. 17:4,5) is surely teaching that we have no ability to judge the sincerity of

repentance; all we can do is forgive. Seven being the number of completeness, we are surely to understand this saying as not so much 490 times, but an infinite number of times.

18:23 *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened*- This "therefore" is crucial. Because we must forgive 490 times / day regardless, therefore, of the sincerity of repentance, *therefore* the Kingdom of God [i.e. the behaviour of those who claim to be under the domain of God's Kingship] is like the forgiveness of the King of that Kingdom. How was it that he had a servant who was so hopelessly in debt? 10,000 talents can be seen not as a literal number but as meaning 'a huge, infinite amount'. How did the position arise? Because the King had repeatedly forgiven him debts without demanding repayment, and had given in to requests for yet more debt. This is the connection between the parable and the fact we have to forgive 490 times / day. It's because we too repeatedly sin each and every day. How many times do you catch yourself each day muttering or thinking a brief prayer for forgiveness of some failure? If it's not 490 times, then that's because you're not sensitive enough to human failure and Divine standards. And how really sincere is our repentance each time? Do we not find ourselves asking for the same basic sins to be forgiven, hour by hour, day by day? If we have been forgiven so much, then we simply *must* accept the little ones and forgive them, regardless of their repentance.

To a certain King- Gk. 'an *anthropos* King', a human king. This strange phrase emphasizes how the King in view here, the Lord Jesus, was and is only exalted to Kingship because of His humanity. He is judge *because He is* the "son of man". In the issues and feelings regarding forgiveness and acceptance, the Lord Jesus fully understands our humanity.

Who would make a reckoning with his servants- The word is only used again in 25:19 about the last judgment. And yet the parable seems to speak as if the last judgment is only at the end of the story, after the forgiven servant has had time to grab his fellow servant, demand the debt, get him into prison, and the other servants have gone to inform their Lord, who then punishes him with "torment". There is an intended confusion here- because the essence of judgment day is going on now, and we 'make the answer now' every time we are confronted by a little one needing acceptance into our closed circle, every time we are sinned against, every time a sheep goes astray. This is seamlessly in the spirit of the earlier part of this block of teaching, where the Lord has spoken of those who offend the little one by not accepting and not forgiving as being sure of future damnation, and has urged us to cut off any parts of our lives which have stumbled others and cast them from us, as a symbol of self-condemnation now, so that we are not condemned in the final judgment.

The Lord spoke of how when we sin, He 'takes account' of us and forgives us- and we are to respond by being frankly forgiving to those in our debt (Mt. 18:23,24). But the Lord uses the very same words and imagery in speaking of how at His return, He will "take account" of His servants and utter an unchangeable verdict upon them (Mt. 25:19). The connection of thought is surely to indicate that in our repeated experience of sin, coming before the throne of grace, receiving the judgment of condemnation, seeing it changed and responding by showing grace, we are living out the essence of the meeting with God which is yet to come. This is how God uses our experience of sin, repentance and forgiveness. The whole process is in order to give us an insight into the future judgment. The reality is that in those experiences of today, we can change the verdict. But in the last day it will be too late.

"Reckoning" is a *logos*. He asks us even in this life [see on *Take account*] to share our inner motives and core feelings / ideas with Him, the *logos* of our lives. Especially in this area of rejection of others and unforgiveness of them. The king (Jesus) makes a reckoning with His servants right now, and it is for us to be influenced by the gracious accounting He shows towards us, and then in this life reflect an appropriate grace to our brother (Mt. 18:23 RV). The reckoning is going on right now, indeed in a sense it occurred on the cross.

18:24 *And when he had begun to reckon*- See on :23 *take account*. These words were spoken to Peter, and he seems to have later grasped their meaning when he wrote of how judgment is now beginning at the household of God, the church, "us" (1 Pet. 4:17- the same Greek word for 'beginning' is used). Every time we engage with those who sin against us, each moment we remember them and the associated situations, we stand at the day of judgment making our own answer according to how we think and feel towards them. It is a very personal question. We simply cannot exclude them just because the circle of disciples around us [with which this section began] are hard set against those persons. We are to be as the Lord, and break the circle, putting the child in the midst. In a sense the judgment process has already begun; Mt. 18:24 says that the Lord has "begun to reckon" now, and so now we must urgently forgive one another. He is watching our attitude to each other here and now. Mt. 18:33,35 teach that the attitude we have towards our brother deep in our heart will be revealed and discussed with us at the judgment.

One was brought to Him- The same word used about the little ones being brought unto Jesus and being rejected by the disciples (19:13). The word is so often used of how people were brought unto Jesus.

Who owed him- The Greek is also translated 'a sinner', so clear is the connection between debt and sin. The Lord is clearly alluding to His own model prayer, where He taught that we are to ask for forgiveness "as we

forgive our debtors" (s.w. 'one which owed', Mt. 6:12). It seems that although the disciples presumably obediently prayed that prayer, the reality of the implications wasn't felt by them.

Ten thousand talents - One hundred million denarii (Mt. 18:23). This was a monstrous, unimaginable sum- in 4BC, the whole of Galilee and Peraea paid only 200 talents per year in taxes, one fiftieth of the amount. The annual income of Herod the Great is estimated at only 900 talents (New Jerome Bible Commentary). The Lord was using shock tactics to show how great is man's debt to God... and to throw into strong relief the sharp contrast with the way the fellow servant has such a trivial debt. The story is plain. The sins we perceive others have committed against us should be as nothing compared to the huge debt we feel personally before God. This explains why the acceptable man in another parable prays with his hands on his breast- when every Palestinian Jew would have expected a story about a man praying to feature him with uplifted hands, as was the custom. The unusual element to the story brought out the extent of the man's contrition. Indeed, the total acquittal of the indebted man, with no further penalty at all, would have caught the early hearers by surprise. The man, they imagined, would have walked off surprised by joy, ecstatic, thankful, relieved. And yet he goes and does something totally unexpected and illogical- he grabs another man and demands he pay up his debts. The unexpected twist of the story of course brings out the madness of any unforgiveness on our part, and the awful nature of human ingratitude for forgiveness- just as in the two carpenters parable.

The hopelessly indebted slave had the whole debt reckoned up with him and *then* the Lord wrote it off (Mt. 18:24,25). This was surely for the benefit of the servant. The servant hopelessly, desperately in debt to his Lord is a picture of the believer's debt to God (Mt. 18:25). The Lord didn't say 'Well, don't worry about it, I've got plenty, just forget it'. He reckoned up the exact debt, calculated it with the servant progressively panic stricken as the full figure registered: and "his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made". Only *then*- and this is a crucial feature of the story- "the servant therefore fell down, and besought him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all". This was of course a nonsense; he had no way of paying it. But in his desperation, at the very and utter limits of human feeling, he fain would pay it all. And only then, "the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him". This is not to say that the Lord is a hard man. But His frank forgiveness is not lightly given. Remember that God is elsewhere described as the magistrate who is to be feared, "lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite" (Lk. 12:58). And yet again, the Lord is not a hard man. In the context of our spiritual

bankruptcy, "He constantly lendeth to thee" (Job 11:6 Heb.); and yet He demands our deep recognition that He deserves and in a sense should be given it all back. This will be our attitude, if we appreciate that indeed sin is serious.

There are degrees of sin- in God's sight. But this parable teaches that for us, our perception is to be that the colossal extent of our sin is such that we should be eager to forgive anyone anything, because whatever they have done is so small compared to *what we perceive* that *we* have done. The difficulty is that it may actually be that in God's judgment, some have sinned less than us- and we get a strong hint at the nature of that judgment in the Bible. But *from our perspective* we are to feel that our sin is so much hugely greater than anything anyone else has done. Paul was a great example of this, progressing over time as he wrote his letters from considering himself "least of the apostles" to being "less than the least of all saints" to finally being "chief of sinners".

18:25 *And since he could not pay*- Neither of the indebted servants in the parable could pay. It's an urban myth to think or assume that in cases of sin against us, the sinner can put it right. He cannot. The only way forward is unconditional forgiveness on our part, which must be granted knowing that the person cannot put anything right. This is a window onto the issue of whether or not we should forgive only if the person repents. The parable is at pains to demonstrate that personal debt cannot be repayed- all that can be done is to write it off. Even if letters of regret are written in total sincerity and with absolute meaning behind every word, they can never repay the debt. All we can do is to forgive, and therefore the person's repentance to us is in that sense irrelevant.
It could be argued that the man truly wanted to pay the debt, but was unable. This should be our feelings about our sins. The man was forgiven his debt due to his *desire* to repay it, even though in fact he couldn't repay it. Sin can, in a sense, never be put right, it can only be covered over. And the man was expected to reflect his experience of forgiveness in how he dealt with his brother. Our fellowship of failure should be bound close together by our common experience of God's forgiveness. What we owe to God can never be repaid. Realizing this affects how we define what is repentance. Just one sin brings eternal death; after sinning, we cannot go back and re-live those minutes, hours, days or years when it was committed. All we can do is trust in God's grace and believe that God will negate the just results of that sin. Because we are forgiven debts which we can never repay, we are asked to liberally forgive our brethren for their far smaller debts. It appeared that the man who owed a small amount was better able to repay it than he who owed much. But the *ability* of our brethren to repay the debt of their sin is not something we should consider. Surely this is what the parable teaches. The *ability* of people to repent is something we should not *consider*. God

does not consider *our* ability to repay Him- for we are utterly unable to do so.

A case can be made that the man did in fact have some of the money, because he had stolen it [rather than borrowed it] from the King, and had at least some of it stashed away- see on 18:34 *The tormentors.*

His master ordered that he be sold- This King is clearly angry and hurt at the extent of the debt; but he also has a heart of compassion (:27). According to the story line, he really intended the servant to be sold to another master. He didn't want anything to do with this man any more. But then he changed. Without this detail about the King's anger, we would be left with the impression that he is a soft hearted type who didn't take the personal loss, betrayal and pain with any real personal suffering. But the Heavenly King, God Himself, does indeed have these feelings, and it is this reality which gives backdrop and meaning to His frequent movement with compassion in subsequently forgiving us. His forgiveness of sin, just like ours, doesn't mean that He is indifferent to sin. This is therefore a recognition by the Lord that forgiveness isn't instant nor automatic, but that like God, we will legitimately feel hurt and anger before moving on to forgiveness.

With his wife and children- The Lord spoke this in the first instance to Peter personally, in answer to his question. Peter had a wife (1 Cor. 9:5) and at least one child (1 Pet. 5:13). Likewise the way the servant "fell down" before the King (:26) is just as Peter had recently done before Jesus (Mt. 17:6 s.w.).

And all that he had- But he "had" [s.w.] nothing to pay with, "he had not to pay" [AV]. What he did have was not even the right currency with which to repay what he owed. Even if he and his family were sold to be someone else's slaves, the amount received would be tiny compared to the huge debt. We are maybe intended to imagine that it was reflection on this fact which led the King to simply show compassion. We cannot repay our debt to God, even if we give our bodies and very being to Him. All we can do is hope for His grace, and so it is with our forgiveness of others.

And payment to be made- The idea is of repayment, putting things right. The powerful point of this parable is that when someone sins against us, they *cannot* put it right, they cannot repay. We must forgive without that- which meshes well with the impression we get from this entire section that we are to accept, receive and forgive the little ones in an absolutely open manner without demanding repentance or them restoring a situation. So much forgiveness and reconciliation fails to happen in practice because of this assumption that the one who has done wrong must somehow put it right. Even if e.g. a stolen item is restored, the

damage done in other ways by the theft cannot be put right. Except by our forgiveness.

18:26 *The servant therefore fell on his knees, saying*- This is precisely what the second servant does to the forgiven servant (:29 s.w.; he also asks for "patience" just as the first servant did). Our situation before God is exactly mirrored by the situation of others before us who have sinned. The Lord's prayer had made this point, in asking that we be forgiven *as* we forgive others. Forgiving them, therefore, becomes of utterly crucial importance in our personal salvation. Nothing else we may do or be can compensate for unforgiveness, rejection of little ones, and the subsequent causing them to stumble which this causes. See on :25 *His wife and children*.

Fell down and worshipped- AV. The two words often occur together. The basis of real worship is thereby defined for us as being a deep conviction of the depth of our sin. Such worship isn't therefore something that can just be turned on or turned off. True worship has very deep roots, in deep conviction of personal debt and a core desire to somehow beseech God's grace.

Lord, have patience with me- See on :26 *Fell down*. The servants both ask for "patience", and yet the story invites us to see how irrelevant is that request- no amount of time can repay such a huge debt. Even although the servant therefore doesn't throw himself on the King's grace to the extent he ought to have done, and still entertains the absurd idea that he can actually somehow repay the debt- the King shows grace. Again, the attitude of those 'little ones' we engage with will be far from ideal, they miscalculate their debt just as the servant genuinely thought he could "pay all", they fail to appreciate the damage done, the hurt caused, believing that they can put right what clearly they never can. But the King's forgiveness of that servant is our pattern for forgiving those indebted to us by their sins and poor behaviour. Yet again we see the hint that forgiveness based upon repentance and restoration is not what is needed at all. Sin cannot in that sense ever be restored or put right by the sinner, but only by the grace of the one sinned against.

And I will pay you all that I owe- The servant is presented as insincere, to those who meditate a bit upon the information given. His falling down at the feet of the King was not sincere, surely; for instead of admitting his fault and begging for grace, he claims that with time, "patience", he can actually repay it. No amount of work could repay his debt. The huge sum which he 'owed' the King was so large that we are invited to imagine that the debt had arisen more by theft than by being lent that huge amount. For why would he, a servant, need to borrow such a huge amount? We are led to expect a confession of theft from the King- but there is none. Likewise the huge sum of debt is an element of unreality in the story that attracts our attention. The King typically would have killed such a person-

but this unusual King doesn't do that. He offers him a way out apart from death- and still the man isn't grateful, he doesn't even want to do a period in bonded slavery for his sins. Within the context of Israel, a slave could only be held for seven years. And "in the seventh year he shall go out a free person, without debt" (Ex. 21:2). In the seventh year, all debt was to be forgiven (Dt. 15:1-3). So this gracious King was willing to actually forgive the debt and give the man a path to total freedom. But he didn't want even that- he wanted time so that he could pay the debt. He clearly had no real conception of the extent of his debt. And he even implies that the problem is with the King not being patient enough- as if to say 'If only you were patient, I can pay all this back'.

18:27 *And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion*- The Lord forgave the sinner exactly because he could not put it right. Bearing in mind the insincerity of the man's words and claims even after being called to account, it is clear that the King's pity was not because of the man's genuineness. It was rather pity at the sad state of the man, pity at his pride, at his pathetic wriggling on the hook. The King's pity and forgiveness is set up as the pattern for ours- and this, therefore, must be shown not only to those who appear sincere in their repentance, but to those like this servant, who appear patently insincere, repeating the same sin 490 times each day. The King had pity, realizing that power in this case was solely in His hands. And so it is with our interactions with those who sin against us. We have total power. They are unable to put anything right ultimately. Because they have done what they have done, just as we have done what we have done.

Released him- This is hard to interpret because *apoluo* can have such a wide range of meaning. It can mean to simply send away. Or it could mean that the man had already been bound as a convicted criminal- in which case, the 10,000 talent debt was due to theft, which is likely what the initial hearers would've assumed anyway.

And forgave him- The same word translated "forgive" occurs in 19:14, where the Lord rebukes the disciples for forbidding the little ones to come to Him, and tells them to "Suffer [s.w. "forgive" through the idea of leaving alone] the children". The suggestion is that despite all this emphasis on receiving little ones, the disciples failed to do so still. This shouldn't be hard for us to imagine, because the church is full of those who know these principles in theory but fail to apply them, turning away so many little ones week by week. The king forgave his servant; but in the parable of Lk. 16:7, it seems that the king's servants also have the power to forgive others what they owe to their lord. Our forgiveness of others is therefore recognized in Heaven, although that is not to say that if we will not forgive a person, therefore God will not. The connection between our forgiveness and God's forgiveness (in the context of this section's teaching about offence) may be that if we don't forgive people,

they often stumble out of the way of relationship with God and thereby God doesn't forgive them. Whereas if we forgive them and accept them, they often remain in a relationship with God whereby their sins are forgiven by Him.

I mentioned under 18:26 *I will pay you all* that the King was alluding to the seventh year release for slaves. But this King, despite the insincerity of this servant, simply proclaims the forgiveness and release there and then. This is how King Jesus operates- He makes the seventh year of release the ongoing status in which He lives with men and women. And this is to be our pattern, not waiting until the seventh year, not demanding a passage of time or partial restoration before we forgive, but doing so immediately without attention to issues of sincerity of repentance. The King's example in immediately offering the spirit of the seventh year release is surely saying that we should forgive and accept without demanding any passage of time. Observation of ecclesial life suggests that in the end, members are forgiven about anything, but it just takes time. But if forgiveness is going to be granted, why not grant it immediately… The release from slavery and debt in the seventh year was on the basis that Israel had been released from slavery in Egypt by grace (Jer. 34:13,14; Dt. 15;12-15), an exodus which speaks of our baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2). If we have been released, we are to thus release others. They were to "let go" their indebted slave brother (Dt. 15:12 Heb.) just as Israel were "let go" from Egypt (Ex. 5:1). They were to send away the released slave "not empty handed" but with gifts (Dt. 15:13)- exactly as Israel left Egypt *not empty handed* but with the gold and gifts of Egypt (Ex. 3:21,22; 12:35,36).

I noted at 18:21 *Seven times* that Peter's initial question about forgiving "until seven times" was a quotation from Dan. 4:23 about the seven times or years punishment upon Nebuchadnezzar. It could be the Lord is alluding to this in saying that the spirit of the seventh year or 'time' should be lived out all the time; they were not to wait "until seven times" or years to forgive. And the release from debt must be given no matter how insincere the debtor, and no matter how huge the debt. And immediately. The Lord's language of loosing and forgiving debt and His allusion to the seventh year release is therefore radical and far reaching. If we are to show His forgiveness, then we have no option but to be absolutely open and inclusive of all. According to Jer. 34:17-22, Judah's captivity in Babylon was solely because they had rejected the need for granting release to their brethren; for that they were condemned.

The debt- An unusual Greek word is used here to express debt. *Daneion* occurs only here in the New Testament. It seems to mean a gift as well as a debt; there were other standard words for "debt" which the record could have used, but did not. Perhaps the strange word choice

is to teach us that whatever we think we have borrowed or even stolen from the Lord cannot really ever be repayed- it is effectively made a gift to us. In our forgiveness of others, we must remember that they can never repay, and so our forgiveness of them is not on the basis that they have repayed something, but on the basis that we consider their theft from us to be a gift from us to them.

18:28- see on 20:15.
But that servant went out and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred denarii- "Went out" is the language of condemnation at the last day. By being unforgiving to our brother, we are condemning ourselves. And this has been the Lord's message earlier in this section- for those who make their brother to stumble by not accepting and forgiving him, they have an awful condemnation awaiting them. "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain '"went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). Yet Peter in this life "went out" from the Lord (Mk. 14:68) and then some minutes later further "went out and wept bitterly" (Lk. 22:62), living out the very figure of rejection at the judgment- and yet was able to repent and come back. In this life we can be judged, condemned, weep...but still repent of it and thereby change our eternal destiny. But at the final judgment: it will be just too late. That 'judgment' will be a detailed statement of the outcome of the ongoing investigative judgment which is going on right now.

He remained in the service of his master, even though the master / King had considered selling him into slavery to another man. But this King retained such a bad and insincere servant- again, setting up the pattern for our unlimited acceptance of others and not rejecting them. The staggering number of unrealities in this parable is in order to direct us towards the need for radical acceptance of others and open forgiveness without repentance- things which are indeed unreal for us in their demands. And yet without this, can we be forgiven? Faced with the teaching here, I end up asking God for what apparently I cannot or should not ask- forgiveness for my unforgiveness. And strength to indeed forgive, quicker and more fully.

And he laid hold on him- The Greek is several times used to mean 'arrested'. The first servant had the power to arrest and "cast into prison" (:30). We assume therefore that the first servant was a senior one, hence

his ability to borrow or steal 10,000 talents. And still he has retained his position!

And took him by the throat- The Greek means to choke or strangle, it is only elsewhere used about the choking to death of the Gadarene pigs in the sea, representative as they were of condemnation of the unclean at the last day (Mk. 5:13). He was not only demanding repayment but almost killed the man in order to extort a promise of repayment. All our sympathies are directed by the story to be against this first servant- but he was the one who the Lord who knows all was so forgiving and acceptant towards. And that is set up as our example.

Saying: Pay what you owe- There was indeed a debt. We are to forgive the person who 'repents' 490 times / day for the same sin. Clearly enough, their repentance wasn't sincere. Yet we are still to show forgiveness without waiting for repentance. The parable of Mt. 18:28-30 implies that forgiveness involves us not requiring of our brother that which we could legitimately demand of him. That surely is saying that we are to forgive our brother without demanding full repentance in terms of 'putting things right'. We are to follow God's example of frankly writing off the debt. This parable of the debtors splits the responsible into two categories; those who forgive their brother, and those who demand that their erring brother pays up what he owes, even though he can't possibly do so. All of us who walk away from our annoying, spiritually weak brethren (as we perceive them) are playing with our salvation. The day of judgment will be a day of surprises for all of us.

18:29 *So his fellow-servant fell down and begged him, saying: Have patience with me and I will pay you*- The words and actions of the second servant are exactly those of the first servant before the King. We are to see ourselves as the first servant- and he was not very sincere, nor did he appreciate the enormity of what he had done. But we are presented as being him, up to the point where he imprisons his fellow servant. The difference between him and us is that we are to forgive our indebted brother. But our repentances and pleadings for mercy are likewise less than totally sincere- the ease with which we repeat sin is surely proof enough of that. And we are not, therefore, to refuse forgiveness to our brother because we sense his repentance is insincere.

18:30 *But he refused*- The first servant wouldn't show patience to the second servant, even though he had asked the King for "patience" with himself. He didn't believe that the second servant would repay the money given time. And yet he puts him in prison, from where likewise the second servant will have no possibility of repaying the debt. He has no sensible option than to write off the debt. Just as forgiveness with or without repentance is not ultimately an option for us. The request for patience

was exactly what he had made to the King. The King dismissed it as unreal and untrue; the King didn't say 'OK, well, in six months' time, then'. He just forgave him. The first servant was being brought to realize how he had made the King feel. The very similarity with his own position surely beckoned him towards a similarly gracious response. But he would not. The awfulness of the situation becomes even worse if we consider that he was delivered to the torturers in order to repay the money because he [presumably] did in fact have much of the money, but had stashed it away in secret locations; see on :34 *The tormentors*.

And had him cast into prison- See on :28 *Laid hands on*. He was a senior servant who still had the power to do this. The King expressed his anger in a more Biblical way- the first servant was to be sold as a slave labourer so that at least some of the debt would be repaid, and then in the seventh year he would go free and the debt cancelled. But that servant now puts the other servant *in prison*. The Law of Moses never envisioned any kind of prison system, even though there were prisons in the surrounding cultures. Rather was correction to be effected more quickly and at the hands of those who had been offended or wronged. In prison, the man had absolutely no chance of repaying the debt, and so to imprison until he should repay the debt is oxymoronic. And obviously so, especially to the initial audience. They knew that those in prison had to be provided for by their families, and so the truth was actually the opposite- imprisoning the man would increase debt, not reduce it. But this is what we do by not forgiving people- we put them in a position where they are a spiritual liability to others, and we assign them to a place where they can never get right with us. Because the earlier section in this block of teaching has demonstrated that to not forgive or to exclude is to cause another to stumble. Not forgiving damages the unforgiven person- that's the point. It puts them in a place where they cannot escape- it makes them stumble, or as in this parable, it imprisons them. This is a powerful picture of the damage caused by unforgiveness.

Until he should pay that which was due- Another possible twist to the story is that the first servant believed that the second servant had family members or friends who were capable of paying the debt; by throwing him into prison, he was thereby putting pressure on the family to pay the debt. This kind of thing often happens with forgiveness; granting forgiveness or acceptance is made possible only if third parties respond. Typically the argument is 'We will only accept you if you reconcile with X or Y'. The King, by contrast, dealt directly with the offender in offering a way forward- and finally abandoned any attempt at partial and negotiated solutions, and just gave frank and total forgiveness.

18:31 *When his fellow servants saw what had taken place*- There is a similarity with the workers who notice the weeds sown amongst the wheat and who then go and tell their Lord, rather than taking affairs into their own hands.

They were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place- What are we to do when brethren... refuse to speak to us or others, divide families, cause others to stumble; and all the other long list, the endless sentence, which we could now write or come out with? How are we to feel, how are we to cope with it? When the fellow believers saw the unreasonable attitude of a brother against another, they were "vehemently distressed" (AV "very sorry" doesn't do justice to the Greek)- not about themselves, but about the situation and the punishment of their fellow servant. Matthew uses the same Greek words to describe how distressed the disciples were to learn that there was a betrayer amongst them (Mt. 26:22). That extent of distress can destroy men and women. So "they came and told their Lord all that was done". They didn't just "tell Him". They went and told Him. We are invited to imagine the process of coming before the Lord's Heavenly presence in prayer, like Hezekiah spreading Sennacherib's letter before the Lord. The parable suggests there was no response from the Lord to the grieving servants. He called the offender to Him, asked for an account, and punished him. This speaks of how we shall be called to account at the Lord's return. But until then, there's silence from the Lord. But that silence is to develop our faith and perspective in the day of judgment. If there were bolts of fire from Heaven in response to our prayers, there would be no faith required, no longing for the Lord's return, no trust in His ultimate justice. The Greek translated "told" means 'to declare thoroughly'. Tell the Lord every detail of what happened, how you feel; what colour shirt he was wearing, exactly how she looked at you. Just as children artlessly retell every detail of a hurtful event. When they saw "what was done", they came and declared thoroughly to their Lord "what was done" (Mt. 18:31). The double repetition of the phrase suggests we should indeed tell all the details to Him; but not more, and stripped of our interpretation of them. Prayer isn't to be merely a list of requests; it's a pouring out of ourselves and our situation before God, as David taught us in his Psalms. And in this sense one rises from their knees healed and able to cope. The believers of the parable told their Lord of the ungrateful behaviour of their brother (Mt. 18:31)- they brought the situation before Him, without asking specifically for something to be done.

18:32 *Then his Lord summoned him and said to him: You wicked servant; because you pleaded with me*- What is the function of the detail about the fellow servants informing their Lord, and His response being to call the wicked servant and punish him? The calling to account and 'eternal punishment' is surely allegorical of the second coming of Christ and the

final judgment. The impression is surely that He is encouraged in doing this by His servants coming to Him and sharing with Him their hurt at the way His servants are being treated- both within the household as well as outside of it.

I forgave you- The Lord was absolutely sure that He would be victorious on the cross; His parables speak of our responsibilities and blessings on account of what He knew He would achieve for us. Thus the Master in the parable is able to remonstrate with the unforgiving servant: "I forgave you all that debt". The Lord's assumption was that He would attain our forgiveness on account of successfully enduring the cross. Yet He triumphed through His faith; although He was all too aware of the human possibility of failure, He believed He wouldn't fail, He made use of the constant encouragement of the word to this end. He described Himself as the Lord of the servants, and also as the King (e.g. Mt. 18:23 cp. 31- there are other similar parables)- even before His cross. He had such confidence that He would be crowned as a result of His future cross. The tenses in Greek can be used very exactly (unlike Hebrew); it was quite within the ability of the Lord to build into His parables the concept of future Kingship. He could have implied 'When I'm King, I'll judge like this'. But instead He saw Himself as already having overcome. "Be of good cheer, I have (already) overcome the world... now I go my way to him that sent me (bypassing the cross in His words) ... I have glorified thee... I have finished the work thou gavest me to do" (Jn. 16:33,5; 17:4); these are only a few samples of the Lord's remarkable confidence that He would overcome. This confidence is reflected in the parables. He was practising His own preaching concerning believing that we have already received what we ask for. No doubt His words recorded in Jn. 15-17 and the parables which reflected this confidence came back to Him as He struggled to quell His crisis of doubt in Gethsemane.

All that debt- The hint could be that the exact amount was still clearly in the King's mind. God forgives sin but He doesn't literally forget it in the sense of as it were deleting it all from memory cells. It is 'forgotten' in the metaphorical sense of not being held against us. Peter was the one initially addressed here, and he uses the ideas in his later letter, when he criticizes some of his converts for having forgotten that they were purged from their old sins, and notes that therefore they were without motivation in living the Christian life (2 Pet. 1:9).

Because you desired me- AV. Actually, as noted at :26, the wicked servant didn't actually desire forgiveness of the debt. He asked instead for time, "patience", so that he could repay everything he owed. The pity of the Master was more because of the man's lostness and how little he appreciated his own position. However, the Master kindly and sensitively read through the man's request for 'time to repay' to the desire of the man's heart- that the debt be written off in total. And he did so. The

Father and Son likewise perceive the spirit behind our prayers, and see through the surface level word choice which we make. This of itself is a great comfort to those who fear that they 'are not good at praying'. Because it is our inner spirit rather than our word choice which is the essence of prayer.

18:33 *Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow-servant*- This doesn't give the force of *dei*, which is the imperative, 'must'. The idea isn't that he *ought* to have been compassionate, but that he was obligated to be, he 'must' be like that. This is exactly the teaching of the earlier part of the chapter- condemnation awaits us *unless* we are forgiving and acceptant of others.

Even as I had mercy on you?- The Lord's compassion is clearly intended to be ours, who are to live and move and feel "in Him". The Lord of the servant "*was moved with compassion* and forgave him"- the very words used about the Lord being "moved with compassion" for the spiritual and human needs of the Galilean Jews He lived amongst in His life. But the point of the parable was: "...shouldest not thou also have had compassion…?" (Mt. 18:27,33). If we have seen and known His compassion, ought we not also to show that compassion in the same way as He did and does? His compassion must be ours. The Samaritan of Lk. 10:33 was clearly intended to be interpreted as the Lord Jesus. He "had compassion" on the dying man of humanity, not counting the personal cost and risk; and then the Lord bids us each to go and do likewise. Our 'doing likewise' will issue in us too sensing the tragedy of those who have not heard, of those without a shepherd, of those who have fallen out of the way. We will be like the Father who was likewise moved with compassion for his wayward son (Lk. 15:20). The crowds of unknowing people who stream before us each day, the sad fact that we are so outnumbered in this world, that those you live and work with are dying in ignorance of the wonderful eternity that *could be* for them… that they live their lives in the darkness of selfishness, as existence rather than real life, without the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as it is in the face of Jesus Christ… all these things will powerfully *move us* to witness after the pattern of our Lord.

"Even as" is the very teaching of the Lord's prayer, wherein we daily ask for forgiveness *as* we have forgiven others, in accordance with our attitude to them. This is the very meaning of those who sin against us in life- their function is really to provide us with practice for forgiveness and thereby a basis for our own forgiveness.

18:34 *And his lord was angry*- The wrath of God here stands in sharp contrast to the amazing grace He has just shown to the indebted man. His anger was not that the man had stolen such a colossal sum from him [see on *The tormentors*], not admitted it, not appreciated the depth and gravity of the theft, not repented… but rather that despite that, the man

would not forgive another. The purpose of the parable in its end thrust [which is so significant in nearly all the parables] is that unforgiveness of others is the ultimate and worst sin, far worse than anything else, including lack of repentance for our own sins.

And delivered him to the jailors- In the Lord's frank forgiveness of the heavily indebted man, there was no mention of any conditions. But when that same man refused to forgive his debtor, he was brought back into court, the debt was re-instated and he was eternally imprisoned until he paid every bit of it. The frank forgiveness of the debt, the 'release' from it, was actually conditional on him being forgiving to others subsequently. But that condition wasn't mentioned.
In the furniture of the parable, the tormentors may refer to the prison keepers. But the same word is used in Rev. 14:10; 20:10 about the tormenting in fire of the beast and his supporters at the last day. Clearly the point is that self-righteous unforgiveness of the little ones, the obviously immature and even insincere, will lead to the same condemnation as the very worst of the world. The same point was made by the Lord talking about offenders of little ones having a millstone put around their neck and cast into the sea- the very punishment of Babylon.

"Jailers" can also be rendered "tormentors". Another option is that the man needed torturing- and that is the essential force of the Greek word used- because clearly his huge debt was a result of theft, and he did actually have the money stashed away somewhere. Hence the need for torturing to get him to confess where it was hidden. This would mean that his claim not to have anything at all to pay back was simply a false plea, a fake repentance. Which would be a function within the story exactly relevant to the context, which is that we should forgive others without limit, regardless of the sincerity of their repentance; and realize that so much of our own repentance is hardly that genuine either, resulting as it has done in the huge debt which we personally owe to God; a debt so great we are to perceive it as far more serious than anything anyone has done to us. If this interpretation of the torturers is valid, and it is hard to interpret it any other way really, then this throws into an even worse perspective the man's demand for the 100 denarii from his fellow servant. He already had considerable wealth stashed away… Remember that this unpleasant, insincerely repentant man is our representative right up to the point where he encounters his fellow servant who is in his debt. All his insincere representations about his debt, his complete failure to appreciate the extent and gravity of what he had done- these are all typical of our shallow repentances. And this serves to remind us not to refuse forgiveness to others because we consider their repentance somehow insincere. We also reflect that the King surely knew that the servant had stolen the money- it was such a huge sum. But He chose not to 'take the matter up'; He didn't make that specific allegation. And this lends weight to my suggestion that the earlier language of 'taking up a

matter' with a brother who has wronged us is not a command for us to do so, but is rather a parody of Jewish and legalistic thinking.

There are of course those who misuse this verse to support their view of literal torture at the last day. But remember that this is a parable, and that every other entity in the parable has a fairly obvious interpretation. The torturers likewise must represent someone or something, rather than be the only element of the parable which is taken literally. That they represent something is clear, but what- is not so clear. In Matthew's pictures of judgment, the Angels have a major part to play in punishing the wicked (Mt. 13:41,42,49,50; 22:13). So perhaps they refer to how Angelically-ministered punishment will bring the wicked to some state of self-knowledge and confession, although tragically all too late.

Until he should pay- The teaching is surely not that through the experience of torment, the man somehow could earn the 10,000 talents. Then he would finally be free and justified before God, as if through some kind of Roman Catholic purgatory. Rather I suggest the Lord is demonstrating His principle of judging people from their own mouths and according to their own words (Lk. 19:22- the context is likewise of a "wicked servant"). The servant had claimed to be able to "pay all" if given time (:29). Now, that untruth is being quoted back to him.

All that was due- The same Greek word is used elsewhere in this chapter only with regard to how the wicked servant perceived the debt of his brother- he uses the word in saying "Pay me what you *owe me* ['what is *due* to me']" (:28), and demanding the man "Pay the debt", 'that which was due' (:30). Again the words and attitudes of the wicked servant are being quoted back to him, and he is being treated as he treated his brother.

The big debtor was rejected because he wouldn't forgive his brother. The Lord says that He will make such a person pay all the debt. There is a connection here with an earlier parable, where He spoke of how unless a man agrees with his adversary quickly, the adversary will drag him to court and jail until he pays all that is due (Mt. 5:26). The adversary of the parable, therefore, is the Lord Himself. He is the aggressive invader marching against us with an invincible army (Lk. 14:31), with whom we must make peace by total surrender. Putting the Lord's teaching in context, He is showing Himself to be very harsh and demanding on the unforgiving believer, but very soft and almost unacceptably gracious to those who show forgiveness.

18:35 *So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you*- The unpleasant wicked servant is therefore symbolic of us each one- at least up until our meeting with our fellow servant, after our own experience of forgiveness. And the wicked servant up until that point is not presented

positively, but rather as insincere in his repentance, and totally miscalculating the extent of his own sin.

If you do not forgive your brother- The same ideas are repeated, relentlessly. This most sober warning applies to each one of us, not to some of us. None are exempt, none are in a position where this problem of forgiveness doesn't apply to them. It applies to each of us. If we consider that we do not struggle with the issue of forgiveness, then it seems to me that we are not in touch with ourselves.

From your heart- By adding this detail, the Lord seems to recognize that forgiveness (like all spiritual characteristics) can appear to have been achieved on the surface, when it has not been achieved in the heart.

CHAPTER 19

19:1 *And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words*- The same phrase is used in 26:1, as if Matthew sensed how the Lord was teaching them in a very structured way, delivering content and then moving on to somewhere or something else as soon as it had been delivered.

He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea on the other side of the Jordan- The significance is that this was the beginning of His journey to Jerusalem and death. The teaching throughout Matthew 18 is profound, He teaches the need for absolute and unconditional forgiveness and perception that our sins are the colossal 10,000 talent debt, making all sin and failure against us thereby seem minimal. And if we 'don't get it', then condemnation awaits us at the last day. And on that note, He finishes the instruction of the twelve and begins His journey to die at Jerusalem. The departure coming straight after His most challenging and profound teaching serves to highlight the importance of it, as if this is the crescendo of His message to His followers.

There is a clearly intended chiasmus developed in this part of Matthew, and whilst chiasmus is a typical way of simply ordering material, it also helps us with interpretation. According to the following pattern, the section about divorce [D1 in the outline below] is to be paralleled with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones and not dividing the body of Christ by unforgiveness [D in the outline]. The body of Christ is Divinely joined together and to refuse to accept its members is to do despite to God's most holy intentions. The teaching against divorce is therefore addressing the same principles. It's a cruel paradox that so many have been so intolerant of divorce based upon this section that they have broken the principles concerning it which are the basis of the parallel section in 18:10-14 about unity and not despising little ones. So what is wrong with divorce is therefore what is wrong with the behaviour criticized in 18:10-14- a despising of others and refusing to view their significance in God's sight, because of our own self-righteousness and self-obsession; a lack of forgiveness and failing to perceive the significance of human relationships before God. Thus to divorce your partner becomes parallel with not accepting your brother / the "little ones'.

"A. 17:24–27: Giving freely; money; sacrifice
Challenge
"Parable" (Who should pay taxes anyway?)
B. 18:1–7: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven
C. 18:8–9: Sacrifice of the body for the sake of the kingdom
D. 18:10–14: Do not despise what God values
Parable (Lost sheep)
E. 18:15–17: What to do when a brother sins
F. 18:18–20: Agreement between heaven and earth

E1. 18:21–35: What to do when a brother sins
Parable (Unforgiving servant)
D1. 19:1–9: Do not separate what God has joined
C1. 19:10–12: Sacrifice of the body for the kingdom of heaven
B1. 19:13–15: Little children are the essence of the kingdom of heaven
A1. 19:16–20:16: Giving freely; money; sacrifice".

19:2 *And great crowds followed him; and he healed them there*- The emphasis is upon the location of these mass healings- "there", in Judea "beyond Jordan" (:1), a semi-Gentile area. The suggestion grows stronger and stronger that the future of His work is with the Gentiles.

19:3 *And Pharisees came up to him*- Presumably "there", beyond Jordan. They had maybe heard that He was there because of the rumours of great miracles, and yet they made the effort to go to Him there with their legalistic questions. Their petty legalism contrasts sharply with the wonder of His teaching and extent of His miracles. They tagged along with the crowds, for they "also" came unto Him.

And tested him, by asking- Another hint that the source of 'testing' in the wilderness which returned to the Lord later in His ministry was from the Jewish satan / adversary.

Is it lawful to divorce one's wife- According to the chiasmic structure of this section [see above], this teaching about divorce is parallel with the Lord's teaching about not despising little ones but rather unconditionally forgiving them (see notes on chapter 18). It cannot therefore be accidental that there is a word play in the usage of the word *apoluo*, to "put away", because the word is also used concerning forgiveness, the sending away of the sin of another, and releasing them from debt to us. The word has just been used in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. And so the question here is whether a man could put away / forgive / release his wife "for every cause". In a sense, the man was indeed to release / forgive his wife for every cause, for everything. But of course the Pharisees had in view the sense of sending away in divorce, and not forgiveness. The Lord surely means them to understand that they should send her away- in forgiveness.

For any cause?- The standard interpretation is that the Pharisees were seeking to draw the Lord into taking a position behind either the school of Hillel (that a man might divorce his wife for any reason) or that of Shammai (divorce was allowable only for unfaithfulness). The Hillel school had justified Herod Antipas recent marriage on this basis, and he was likely to crack down on anyone teaching otherwise- this was obviously one reason they sought to lead the Lord into this whole minefield. But if so, the question arises as to why they should raise this issue with Him so apparently 'out of the blue'. If the question was simply as to which

rabbinic school the Lord supported on this issue, then it would seem that He quite clearly came down on the side of Shammai- 'for unfaithfulness' (:9). But whenever the Lord was given such questions, He always avoided giving such direct answers but rather elevated the issues to a much higher and yet more essential level. I suggest that what they found so shocking was His teaching about unconditional forgiveness regardless of the sincerity of repentance, and so they came to Him with the case of adultery in marriage- where surely, so they thought, there could be no forgiveness for adultery and in fact Moses commanded that a man divorce his wife in this case. Whichever rabbinic school the Lord supported, He would surely have to admit that there were some sins which could not just be forgiven but must be acted upon in terms of divorce and exclusion from the marriage. Their use of *apoluo*, to "put away", was therefore a conscious allusion to the Lord's usage of the word in 18:27, where the gracious Lord "loosed" [s.w.] the wicked servant from his huge debt without repentance. So I would read the Pharisees here as implying: 'You claim a man must forgive his brother anything without checking out his repentance; but OK, can a man really forgive his *wife* "every cause"? And Moses surely did sanction divorce for some reasons, whether you go with Hillel ['every or any cause'] or Shammai [for adultery]". In terms of connection with the Lord's previous teaching, the Lord had taught that if someone sins against you, i.e. a personal offence, then you can drag them through the synagogue discipline system ["tell it to the *ekklesia*/ assembled meeting"]- although the higher level was unconditional forgiveness. For many listeners and readers, that teaching begs the very same question: "OK, so far so good, Jesus… but really, literally, for every cause, in every case…?". The Pharisees are asking this question, assuming that they have the Lord trapped because Moses teaches divorce for some things. Of course, Moses doesn't 'teach divorce'- there was a higher level. If your wife sinned against you, you could do as Hosea did, and simply forgive her, rather than making use of Mosaic concessions. Hence the Lord's answer is basically that any verses in the Law which might appear to teach divorce are in fact concessions to human weakness and not the ideal standard.

19:4 *And he answered and said: Have you not read*- The Lord is addressing the literate Pharisees, rather than the illiterate crowds who *heard* rather than *read*. His implication is that He wondered whether they had even read the opening passages of the Torah, which describe the creation of Adam and Eve. They had of course read them, but the Lord's implication is one which echoes down to us today- we can read, many times, and yet not really read as God intends, and not grasp the most essential meaning of the text. So many times the Lord uses this challenge- 'Have you not / never read?' (in Matthew alone: 12:3,5; 21:16,42; 22:31). This perhaps is one of our greatest temptations in this over-literate age- to read, but not really read.

The parallel Mk. 10:3 records the Lord asking "What did Moses command you?". We note He doesn't say 'command *us*', not because He considered Himself above the Mosaic law, but maybe because the law was a bond of covenant between God and Israel, and He saw Himself as the mediator of a new and different covenant. His point was that Moses had written this command to "you" the hardhearted, those so hard and spiritually dry that they needed such concessions from God (Mk. 10:5)- but the Lord wasn't in that category. The two questions are connected to each other- 'Have you not read?' is followed by a request for them to quote what they had read ["What did Moses command you?"]. This highlights the Lord's point that one can know the text of Scripture and be able to quote it and even sensibly discuss it- without having *really* read it for ourselves in the sense of grasping the personal message and implication for ourselves.

In Mark, the Lord begins His reply by pointing out that Moses' teaching about divorce was "for the hardness of your heart", and was a concession to their weakness not found in God's original intention "at the beginning". Their legalistic mindset considered that if Moses stated something, then it was a command to be obeyed. But the Lord tried to demonstrate there were different levels accepted by God- rather as He had taught in chapter 18 that in the case of personal sin, we can drag the person through the synagogue discipline process, or apply the higher level of forgiveness without qualification and condition. And He repeats that here- seeking to get them to see that the higher level was to stay together and remain in with the process of unity between persons that God wishes to operate; and the lower level would be to make use of Moses' concessions to human hardness. Assuming a literal record of the Lord's words here, Mt. 19:8 repeats the point that Moses allowed divorce "for the hardness of your heart"; the idea of Moses having granted a concession was significant to the Lord. Because His theme here as in chapter 18 was that there are different levels upon which we can live before God, and thus had it ever been.

That He who made them from the beginning made them male and female- The whole nature of creation was so that there would be a process of division, separation and then uniting together to produce fruit. The processes of separation and unity were inbuilt to creation, but we are to allow them to operate in the way that God intends- not needlessly separating and not uniting in wrong ways at the wrong times. Various views of evolution are disallowed for those who believe the Lord's words here- that male and female were created by God in the beginning.

19:5 *And said: For this cause shall a man*- Although a different original word is used, the idea is clearly the same as in the original question in :3, about whether it was lawful to divorce "for every cause".

Leave- The Hebrew and Greek words for "divorce" mean literally to go or send away from. And this is the same idea which the Lord now uses (although a different original word) in saying that because of how God created humanity, a man will leave or go away from [the same idea as 'divorce'] his parents and cleave to his wife. The Lord is surely saying that the process of leaving / separating and cleaving to another is natural and intended by God- but it must be done within the bounds of His intentions.

His father and mother and shall cleave to his wife- Translated in Eph. 5:31 as "shall be joined to his wife". The reference in my opinion is not to the wedding nor to the sexual act so much as to a process of being joined together, parallel with 'becoming one flesh', which is conducted by God in response to a man and woman wishing to come together. This involves His work on the minds of the couple and through orchestrated circumstance in their lives which results in their coming together as one. But the process is ongoing. This is surely a parade example of where God is able and eager to work on the minds of people directly. There could be no falser impression than that an indifferent God faces off against man over an open Bible, leaving it over to us how far we wish to be obedient. He is actively seeking to work in the very inward parts of the minds of His people, by His Spirit, in order to bring us together with Him and each other. The reason why sex before marriage or casual sex is wrong is that this is a physical coming together without the spiritual bonding or joining process which God has promised to perform in the lives of His people. The existence of this bonding process is another reason why marriage to unbelievers is not appropriate- because it will be hard for God to work on the heart of a person who has closed their heart to Him.

And the two shall become one flesh? - "*Shall be* one flesh" (AV) is a future tense. The process of unifying works towards a final unity between persons called "one flesh". It's hard to say what point is in view here- a point where a married couple are "one flesh" presumably speaks of the consummation of marriage in sexual intercourse. Clearly the whole implication here is that two people cleave to each other whilst at the same time leaving their parental background or family of origin, and during that process there is a psychological process of confirmation going on from God, binding them together; and this then comes to term in "one flesh". This intended process rules out casual sex, just as it rules out individuals remaining psychologically bonded to their parents or family of origin. The false teaching regarding sexual matters argued that sleeping with a prostitute was OK so long as it was understood that the sexual act made two into flesh (1 Cor. 6:16); but this of course was just attaching a Bible verse to a situation in order to justify what people wanted to do. In sleeping with a prostitute, two do not become one in the Biblical sense because there has not been the spiritual process of God joining the couple. And that is what is wrong with it.

19:6 *So they are no more two but one flesh*- This appears to be a status, referring to marriage rather than solely to the sexual act. Because it is paralleled with "what God has joined together" and is not to be sundered.

What therefore God has joined together- As a couple "cleave" to one another, so they become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). But this becoming one flesh is interpreted by the Lord Jesus as meaning that God actively joins the couple together; as *they* cleave to each other in the process of their relationship, so *God* joins them together. Clearly the Lord understood Gen. 2:24 as speaking of the process of marriage, rather than simply the ceremony of a wedding. In passing, note that the Hebrew idea of two becoming one had already been used in Genesis- the morning and evening, the day and night, were fused by God into one day (Gen. 1:5- the same Hebrew phrase is used). Similarly we read of the waters becoming, or being made one, by God (Gen. 1:9). It's as if the immense power of God in creation is unleashed in His bonding of man and wife together. To put that asunder is to fight against the very creative power of God.

Let not- Because by sundering relationships, we are pitting ourselves against the intentions and processes of God's Spirit and His actions amongst men. But of course we can indeed put asunder what God joined. He does not force His ways and processes upon people. The parallel [see on :1] is with how we can refuse acceptance to the 'little ones' by despising and not forgiving them. God's processes intend to create unity between His people as well as between marriage partners; but we can choose to disallow the effect of His work, both in our own lives and those of others. By rejecting people, the Lord had taught in the previous section of the chiasmus, we make them stumble and damage the "little ones". And those same principles apply in marriage- the little ones are made to stumble, and the rejection of a marriage partner often leads them into sin, i.e. they are made to stumble. This I think is the sense of Mt. 5:32, that divorcing a partner causes her to commit adultery- i.e. we will lead her to a sinful life.

Man separate- The same Greek word is used in 1 Cor. 7:10,11,15 of how Paul allows for a wife to "depart" or 'sunder' from her husband. Clearly, therefore, the Lord is presenting here an ideal state. But that presentation doesn't mean that God will not tolerate lower levels of living before Him. Man can put asunder what God has joined not simply in our own marriage. It can just as much be done by parents seeking to keep their children within the sphere of the family of origin, not letting go; by pressurizing one side of a marriage to adopt a position against their partner, etc. Especially is this true of those who demand that a believing husband or wife not have fellowship with their believing partner because of theological or 'fellowship' differences.

19:7 *They said to him: Why then did Moses command to give* - They had missed the point, that a concession is not a command. Their legalism required that if something was in the teaching of Moses, then this must be done. But they missed the point that there were actually levels of response within the Mosaic law. Adultery could be simply forgiven, dealt with through the trial of jealousy in Numbers 5, become the basis for divorce, or result in the woman being killed. Such a position is very hard for legalists to cope with, desiring as they do clear definition for every situation in life. Hence the Lord emphasized twice in this dialogue that divorce was a concession for their hard hearts.

A certificate of divorce- Gk. *Biblion apostasion*, literally this could be understood as 'A Bible / writing of apostasy'. The 'lower level' option of divorce for adultery was all part of a law which was "holy, just and good", but it could so easily be misused and thus lead people into moral apostasy.

And to put her away- Their legalism is reflected in how they don't simply say that Moses 'commanded' divorce, but rather than Moses commanded a bill of divorce and then divorce. The legal aspect was all important to them.

19:8 *He said to them: Moses for your hardness of heart allowed you to send away your wives, but from the beginning*- Moses allowed divorce for the hardness of Israel's hearts and yet Moses himself appears to have divorced his wife (Ex. 18:2)- for the hardness of his heart? See Dt. 20:14. This appears to be the second time in this discourse that the Lord talks about the way Moses had made a concession to their weakness- see on 19:4 *Have you not read?*

It was not so- Here we have another connection with the preceding argument in chapter 18 (see on :1). This time, to the statement that "it is not so" (same Greek phrase) that the Father wishes a little one to perish, and therefore we should not cause them to stumble but rather forgive and accept them. The idea is clearly that divorcing a partner, even for adultery, rather than forgiving and accepting them still within the marriage, is likely to cause that straying little one to stumble. And this is the whole context of the Lord's teaching that the higher level is not to divorce for adultery- even though He clearly accepts that as a lower level, in the same way as in chapter 18 He accepts the possibility that in the case of personal offence we can drag the offender through the synagogue disciplinary process and reject them. But the problem with that is that it's likely to cause them to stumble, and we will find it hard to do that if we accept the full import of the parable with which He concludes chapter 18. We are to perceive ourselves as the serious sinner, the colossally indebted man, who effectively has no option but to forgive all sin against him. Mark's record goes on to use this same phrase "not [to be] so" in Mk. 10:43, in teaching that it is not to be so amongst us, the community

of God's people, that we are in any sense superior to each other but rather should be servants to each other. Perhaps that also is relevant to this whole issue of whether we demand what is owed us from those who sin against us, even in the case of adultery within marriage.

In Mark's record, the Lord went on to quote from early Genesis: "But from the beginning of the creation: Male and female made He them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so that they are no more two but one flesh". It was Moses who wrote Genesis, under Divine inspiration. So the Lord was saying that actually, Moses within his own writings laid down a principle and yet also recorded a concession to weakness. This idea is so hard for the legalistic mind to accept- that within Divine law there are different levels, all is not black and white.

19:9 *And I say to you*- This rubric is usually used when the Lord is replacing commands of Moses with His own higher standard. He appears to be merely repeating the Mosaic teaching- that there was an exception which permitted divorce, namely adultery, but that otherwise, divorce was not be countenanced. But in this case He would appear to have allowed Himself to have been drawn into the debate between Shammai and Hillel, and was coming down directly on the side of Shammai [divorce only for adultery]. This is not His style- the Lord engages with questions thrown at Him by lifting the issues to a different level, rather than answering them on the same level as they were given to Him. Mark's record has the Lord clearly teaching that divorce should not be countenanced for anything, and the disciples respond in amazement that it would be better not to marry rather than sign up for this (:10). Perhaps they held the common chauvinistic view that a wife was almost inevitably adulterous and would likely need to be divorced at some stage in the marriage. The Lord responds to that by saying that He accepted that not all His followers could live by what He was teaching (:11). To understand how "I say unto you" was therefore something radically new and higher than Moses' teaching, we have to therefore include Mark's record of His teaching that there should never be divorce for any reason. He mentions that there should be no divorce "except for *porneia*" in order to clarify in passing that Hillel's view that Moses allowed divorce for literally anything was not correct. But "I say unto you" suggests He was not merely reiterating Moses' position, but adding something new and more demanding. But we only see what that was by putting Mark's account [no divorce for any reason] together with what we have here in Matthew's. Jewish law in the first century *demanded* that a man divorce his wife for adultery, and in that sense the Lord’s principle that ideally he forgive her rather than divorce her was something radically new.

Whoever shall send his wife away- The Lord seems to have in view a situation where a man proactively takes the decision to send his wife away. The implication could be that if he has to send her away, then she actually wishes to remain with him. The language of sending away surely implies she was still living with him. Therefore what is in view is a situation of unforgiveness on the part of the husband, and that is the entire context of this section of teaching which began in Matthew 18. The adultery was therefore a temporary situation and didn't involve the wife moving in with another man. In such a case, this whole passage is not directly relevant. The more general idea in chapter 18 of dealing with personal sins against us is now in chapter 19 focused down to the classic personal offence, the sin against us of a partner committing adultery. And let us note that the whole passage beginning in chapter 18 is speaking of ideal standards, whilst the Lord is prepared to accept lower standards (:11). Let's remember that in 1 Cor. 7 we are challenged that the single life of devotion to the Lord is the highest level, and marriage in itself is a concession to human weakness which most of us have made use of. And overarching all our thinking about this matter, especially in terms of our response to those who may divorce for not very solid reasons, we have the parable at the end of chapter 18. We are to see ourselves as chief of sinners, with an unpayable and huge debt to the Lord, compared to which all sin against us is of small account. We also need to remember that others' behaviour to each other is not a sin against us. The teaching here is very personal- about how we are to respond to personal sin against us, and here in chapter 19 the specific example of adultery within marriage is raised. This teaching is not really about how we should respond to the sins of others (e.g. divorce for the wrong reasons) which we observe from a distance.

Except for porneia and shall marry another, commits adultery- This is a more general word than *moichao*, the word which refers strictly to 'adultery' and which we find used later in this verse and e.g. in 15:19. Indeed *porneia* appears to be a different category of sexual sin to "adultery" in Heb. 13:4. Remember how this section is an expansion upon the general teaching in chapter 18 about how to respond to personal offences against us. The word in practice, therefore, refers to whatever unfaithfulness constitutes a personal offence against a marital partner. The word could, therefore, just as well refer to the use of pornography. Pushing for a strict interpretation of the word misses the point- that this teaching is in the context of personal offences and forgiving what needs to be forgiven. Any view other than this ends up having to define the word in terms of the insertion of body parts into other body parts; and yet there are a whole range of sexual, mental and emotional positions which may just as well be the *porneia* which a partner must forgive. The Lord's use of *porneia* rather than *moichao* would appear to be a disagreement with Shammai's school, who taught that divorce was possible strictly for *moichao*, adultery. In this we see again that the Lord isn't coming

down on either side of the Shammai – Hillel dispute, but rather teaching an altogether higher level.

And he that marries a divorced woman, commits adultery- I noted above that 'sent away' [NEV "divorced"] suggests the woman has committed adultery but remains living with her husband. The "whoever" here may not necessarily be global, as if to say that anyone who marries a divorced woman is an adulterer. Because clearly the Lord recognizes that adultery breaks the marriage bond and He appears to consider that once that is broken, then remarriage is possible- just as the marriage covenant between God and Israel was broken, and He entered into relationship with another wife, the Gentiles, or more exactly, the body of Christ comprised of whoever (Jew or Gentile) who believes in Christ. It needs to be seriously noted that the English word "whoever" found in many translations doesn't translate any original Greek word in the text. The text literally reads 'And the one marrying her who is sent away commits adultery'. That 'one' in view could well be the man with whom she has had the affair. This reading means that contrary to how some wish to read these words based on the mistranslation "Whoever", the Lord is not in fact condemning second marriage. His theme is of forgiveness, and of the spiritual damage done by not forgiving. If a man will not forgive his wife for an isolated act of adultery, then he is likely to lead her towards marrying the man she sinned with and thereby falling deeper into sin. And her husband's lack of forgiveness will have played a part in making her stumble in this way. This is how I would understand the Lord's teaching in Mt. 5:32, that sending away a wife causes her to commit adultery. See on :10 *The man*.

19:10 *The disciples said to him: If such is the case*- See on 19:9 *I say unto you*. But *aitia*, translated "case", more commonly means an accusation, a legal case against someone. The idea is probably that if by marrying a divorcee or by remarrying after divorce a man is really going to be accused of adultery, then it is better not to marry in the sense of remarrying in the cases the Lord has just outlined. On this reading, they would not be fearful of first marriage, marriage as a concept, but rather of the kind of marriage after a marriage breakup which appears to be adulterous in the Lord's eyes. He therefore goes straight on in :11 to assure them that although they have indeed understood Him correctly, He is talking of ideal standards and is prepared to accept lower achievements and to make concessions to human weakness in this area.

Of a man- AV "The man". The presence of the article suggests that a specific man or case is in view- and this would be 'the one' who marries the woman whom he has had an affair with whilst still living with her first husband, whom he 'sends away'.

With his wife, it is better not to marry- They thought that the Lord's policy

of no remarriage in this case meant that marriage was “not good”. And yet the Genesis record clearly states that it was “not good” for a man to be unmarried. Matthew in his own [over-ruled] word choice seems to be commenting how they were out of step with the spirit of Genesis. However, the Greek reads *sumphero* [‘profitable’, ‘good’] *ou* [not] *gameo* [‘marry’], and a better translation would be ‘It is good / profitable not to marry’. The ‘marrying’ they had in mind was surely the case of marrying a married woman with whom one had had an affair, for this is the ‘marrying’ of the immediate context in :9. The Lord has just used *sumphero*, “good”, in 18:6 in saying that those who offend little ones would be “better” cast into the sea with a millstone around their neck. And He had used it twice earlier in saying that it is “profitable” to lose our dearest body parts and enter the Kingdom, rather than offend a little one and be rejected from it (Mt. 5:29,30). Given the connections between this section about marriage and the earlier teaching about offending little ones in chapter 18 (see on :1), these occurrences of the same word can’t be incidental. Note too that 1 Cor. 7:35 speaks of the single life as being for our “profit” [s.w.]- and Paul’s teaching there about marriage is full of allusion to the Lord’s words here in Mt. 19. The disciples could therefore be read as agreeing with their Lord- it is profitable / good not to marry- in the specific case in view, which is if a man has an affair with a married woman and then is faced with the choice of marrying her. The Lord then almost rushes on to say that in this whole area of sexual and moral failure and less than ideal marital situations, there is the possibility of following Him still even if lower level decisions have been taken and sins committed. The “eunuchs” that He now speaks about in :12 are those for whom marriage was not possible- but His point is, that for some this is simply too much to “receive”, and the implication is that He encourages people to accept the higher level (“let him receive it”) whilst accepting those who don’t.

The New Testament is full of examples of concessions to human weakness. 1 Cor. 7 is a chapter full of this kind of thing. You could paraphrase it something like this: 'Basically, consider the option of not marrying. *But and if* you do, it's no sin. Once married, don't separate; *but and if* you do, this is allowable. If you are an elderly widow, it's best not to re-marry; *but and if* you do, OK go ahead'. The Lord Jesus recognized that these sorts of concessions to failures in married life had been made earlier; He spoke of how God through Moses had "for the hardness of your hearts" allowed divorce under the Law, although this was hardly God's original ideal in Eden (Mt. 19:8). The Lord Jesus spoke the word to His listeners "as they were able to hear it" (Mk. 4:33), following the same pattern. The exceptive clause, allowing divorce for adultery, is a prime example of this kind of concession. And yet the Lord speaks in Mark 10 as if there is no allowance for divorce even in this case; whilst in Matthew’s record He clearly allows it. The point is, God doesn’t advertise His

concessions to human weakness (and neither should we). He leads men to attempt life on the highest level. Likewise Num. 6:7 speaks as if a man *couldn't* make himself unclean and end his vow, whereas in fact there was legislation which allowed him to take this lower level. But the Father doesn't want us to be minimalists, serving Him at the lowest level; quite to the contrary.

19:11 *But he said to them: Not all men can receive this saying*- The saying is surely that of :9 which is prefaced by: "I *say* unto you"- the saying that putting away your wife and remarrying is adulterous. To the legalistic mind, this is so hard to accept that- that a statement that certain behaviour in a given context is adulterous can actually be ignored or broken on the basis that the strength to 'receive' it was not given.

But they to whom it is given- The strength to obey is a gift, just as repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Pet. 3:9 Gk.) and other spiritual fruits are gifts; and in this case, it is not given to all. Again, this is hard for the legalist to accept. It is given to some to receive a saying of Jesus- and not to others. Our greatest obediences, therefore, can never be felt to be purely the triumph of our own strength of will. Even they are gifts of grace. Being 'given' the ability to 'receive' the Lord's word is expressed in terms of being "able" to receive it (:12). No other teacher apart from the Lord would have been so profound as to say that what He was teaching could only be obeyed if we are 'given' the strength to do so. And yet the idea which follows of making ourselves eunuchs for the Kingdom indicates a huge amount of willpower and conscious effort, in order to live up to the potential made possible for us.

19:12 *For there are eunuchs that were born so from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs that were made eunuchs by men*- Perhaps the idea is that there are some people who are put into a position in which they cannot remarry due to the failures of others [cp. "of men"]. The purpose of making men eunuchs was so that they would be faithful servants of a king- and the King in our case is the Lord Jesus.

And there are eunuchs that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake- By the literal cutting off of a body part. In this we see another connection with chapter 18, where the Lord had taught that it was better to cut off body parts in order not to offend a little one (18:7-9). The teaching not to divorce and remarry, to remain single if need be, was therefore not just a command with no reason behind it. The intention, according to the parallel with 18:7-9, was in order not to make the woman concerned stumble because of your unforgiveness of her. Once we perceive this context of forgiveness and not causing to stumble,

we realize that the whole teaching here is not about divorce and remarriage in a global context, but specifically as to what to do in the case that a wife commits adultery as a one-time event, whilst she remains living with her first husband. This was the context of the initial question- is it possible to forgive so unconditionally, as Jesus had just taught, even if your wife commits adultery? And the answer to that is 'yes'. It may be in certain cases of failure that one remains single, making themselves a eunuch, but the decision will be in order not to make another little one stumble and sin. The one caused to stumble may be the first partner, or it could be the woman to whom the husband is subsequently married. This desire not to cause others to stumble, especially the partners involved, is what should be the guiding principle in all our thinking about this vexed topic.

"For the Kingdom of Heaven's sake" is to be paralleled with the command to cut off body parts *in order to the enter the Kingdom* in 18:7-9.

He that is able to receive it, let him receive it- The Greek literally means 'to have space for'. We have here the Lord's recognition of varying spiritual capacities, and His other parables suggest the same in talking of varying amounts of spiritual wealth being given to different servants, with His expectation of differing response. And it is for this reason that our ultimate status in His Kingdom shall vary- one star differs from another in glory, one rules over five cities, another over two. Of course we are all inclined to think that we are one talent material, that this is not given to me to live by. But in this lies the crucial need for a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus within which we ask Him to reveal to us what are His hopes and expectations of us, the nature of our talents and callings.

19:13 *Then little children were brought to him*- This continues the connection with the beginning of this section in chapter 18, which began with a little child being brought to the Lord and Him making the disciples open their closed circle in order to accept the one whom they considered so far beneath them spiritually. He taught then, and teaches again here, that they were to see in the children symbols of themselves, in all their weakness and misunderstanding. In the same way as here the children are "brought" to Jesus, so we often read in the Gospels of people [including the disciples] being "brought" to Him. Their [and our] salvation depends partly upon others having brought us to Him.

So that he should lay his hands on them and pray- The Lord agrees to the request, blessing little ones for the sake of the efforts of third parties who bring them to Him (as in Mk. 2:5 and so often in the work of saving and curing men). As the children 'received' this blessing, so the Lord urges the

disciples to ‘receive’ the things of the Kingdom- for Mk. 10:15 records the Lord’s further comment that “whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it”. Those children receiving His grace and blessing, all the more gracious because they received it thanks to others bringing them to it, represent each disciple who receives the grace and blessing of the Kingdom.

But the disciples rebuked them- Just as they had turned away the little one in chapter 18, as they sought to send away the hungry crowds, forbad John’s disciples and tried to turn away the Syro-Phoenician woman. And they did this despite the Lord’s sober warning that turning away little ones is making them stumble, and will lead to eternal rejection from God’s Kingdom. The disciples in their preaching, of which the Gospels are transcripts, were stressing how they had so failed to grasp this vital teaching.

19:14 *But Jesus said: Let the little children come to me*- See on 18:12 *Leave*.

And do not prevent them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven- The Lord rebuked the disciples for 'forbidding' John's disciples and the little ones to come to Him (Mk. 9:38); and yet He uses the same word to describe how the lawyers hindered [s.w. 'forbad'] people to enter the Kingdom. There's a very clear parallel here between the disciples and their Jewish teachers who had so influenced their thinking. But they finally got there- for Peter insisted that Gentiles should not be forbidden [s.w. 'hinder'] baptism (Acts 10:47); and he uses the same word again when he says that now, he will not "withstand [s.w. 'hinder'] God in hindering people to come to Him (Acts 11:17). The awfulness of the disciples' attitude is brought out by the use of the word in 1 Thess. 2:16, where Paul says that the way the Jews 'forbad' or hindered the preaching of the Gospel was cause for the wrath of God to come upon them "to the uppermost". And the disciples initially followed their Jewish elders in this kind of behaviour. In passing, there is a sober warning here to those who would likewise 'forbid' baptism to those who sincerely seek it, and who will not allow ‘little ones’ to the Lord’s table.

Mk. 10:15 adds: “Whoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no way enter into it”. This is exactly how the whole section began in Matthew (18:3). The Greek for “receive” is often used about people accepting the Gospel. The implication is that one can receive the Gospel of the Kingdom of God- and yet not enter it, because we didn’t receive it as a child. We didn’t accept that we are the ‘little ones’, accepting we know so little, and just marvelling at the special grace being

shown us which we accept in awed wonder. The language of 'entering the Kingdom' is used both of our final entry into the Kingdom when Christ returns (Mt. 25:10,21; Jn. 3:5), and of our current entering the Kingdom. The rich man can enter the Kingdom right now if he sheds the load of his wealth (Mt. 19:23,24). The Scribes stopped and hindered those who were entering the Kingdom from entering, locking the door through which the Kingdom could now be entered, all because they chose not to enter themselves (Mt. 23:13; Lk. 11:52). So it's a case of 'Now but not yet'. We do *now* enter into God's rest, and yet we are promised that we *will* enter that rest at Christ's return (Heb. 4:1-11). The Lord had warned that our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes, or we will likewise not enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20); but that righteousness is in accepting the blessing of righteousness as a little child; for without *that* we shall not enter the kingdom. Those who do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom (Mt. 7:21)- and that will is to be as little children and accept gifts without seeking to justify ourselves or earn them.

Mark and Luke both add that "Whoever shall not *receive* the Kingdom of God as a little child shall not enter therein" (Lk. 18:17). The Greek word for "receive" is different to that used here in :12, where the Lord bids those able to "receive" the highest standard concerning remarriage to do so. But the idea is surely the same. How do we 'receive' His high standards and challenges in personal decision making? By receiving them as those children received His blessings, not arguing back, accepting whatever comes from His hand, not considering that we are in any position to do anything other than receive what He gives us. Note that the children *receiving* His blessings become, therefore, the pattern for our *receiving* His demands upon our personal living, our forgiveness even of adulterous partners, our rejection of legitimate options of remarriage [in some cases] in order to follow His higher standards. This is nothing less than profound.

19:15 *And he laid his hands on them and departed from there*- His blessing was and is mediated without physical contact. The need for physical contact in order to receive blessing was embedded in the religious mentality of the time, and is seen to this day in so many rituals and traditions of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. The sick woman thought to herself that if she could only *touch* Jesus, she would be made whole; but He responded that He made her whole because of *her faith* (9:21,22). He was gently correcting her mistaken understanding of the power of touch. And yet the Lord made a concession to this misunderstanding by indeed touching the children as requested.

19:16 *And someone came to him and said: Teacher*- Mark adds that he came running to Him and kneeled before Him.

What good thing- The man was clearly influenced by the Jewish idea that one supreme good deed could assure the doer of salvation. This was particularly popular amongst the zealots, who considered that suicidal attacks on the Romans could assure them of salvation; the same mentality is to be found in Islamic suicide bombers today. But in His typical manner, the Lord doesn't address the misunderstanding but rather works with it. He ends up telling the man that if he sells all he has and gives to the poor, then he will have "treasure in Heaven" (:21). This, therefore, isn't a global command to every Christian. It was designed especially for this young man who thought that just one great act of obedience would secure salvation. The Lord went along with this by giving him such an example; but added: "And come and follow Me", thus gently correcting the idea that one great act is enough for salvation.

Shall I do- Rom. 7:19 is Paul's allusion here, where he laments that like the young man, the good that he would do [same Greek words] he finds himself unable to do because of the sin that dwells within him. But instead of walking away from the Lord as this man did, Paul threw himself upon the Lord's grace. This zealous young man was also understood by Peter as representative of us all; for he clearly alludes to him in 1 Pet. 3:10,11: "He who would love life and see good days [cp. the young man wanting to "have eternal life"]… let him… do good" (same Greek words).

That I may have eternal life- Mk. 10:17 notes that he also asked what he must do to "inherit" eternal life, as if he considered eternity a right that he must receive if he does only one great deed. The disciples heard the Lord assuring His people that those who follow Him will "*have* eternal life", enter the Kingdom, enter into life, etc. But having heard all that, Peter asked: "We have left all… what shall we *have*?" (Mt. 19:27). The irony of it all is tragic. They'd just been promised they would "have" eternal life. But that wasn't enough. Their focus was very much on this life; what shall we have *here and now*? They couldn't see very much beyond the present, past the curvature of their earth. Ruth's unnamed relative could have been her redeemer; but when he realized he would have to marry her and have children, and split up his fields into more strips so as to give those children an inheritance along with that of his existing children- he pulled out. He wouldn't 'mar his inheritance'. He saw ahead to his death, to the next generation. His horizon was 20 years at most. But Boaz who didn't think like this established his spiritual inheritance eternally, and is therefore mentioned in the Lord's genealogy. Whilst the short sighted man passed off the page of history anonymously; his name wasn't preserved.

19:17 *And he said to him: Why do you ask me about what is good?*- Or: "Why do you call Me good?". The Greek of the subsequent sentence may not mean that the Lord was implying 'Only God is good- I am not good'. Translators have added a number of words to try to flesh out the meaning of the words. The sense could just as well be 'None is as good as the one God'- and therefore, we should keep *His* commandments. In other words, the Lord is not so much saying that He Himself is not 'good' but rather refocusing the man's direction away from Himself towards the Father. For the man had come running to Him asking what he should do in order to inherit or rightfully have eternal life. And the Lord is refocusing the man upon the Father and the Father's commandments. The Lord may therefore have a rhetorical sense in His question '*why* do you call Me good?'. His sense would have been: 'Why are you so keen to call me "good", setting me on a level with God? Instead, focus on obeying God's commandments and tackle your hardest challenge- to give away your wealth, and then follow Me in the itinerant life towards the cross'. The man's overly high and unrealistic view of Jesus, as if He were God Himself, was really an excuse for his own refusal to face the challenge of living the Christian life. Every false doctrine has a psychological basis, and the idea that Jesus is God and the Trinity are no different. To accept Jesus as less than God, as totally human, is a far deeper challenge to our living than accepting Jesus as being God Himself. If Jesus was human, sharing our own flesh, in which there dwells no good thing (Rom. 7:18), and yet was able to be perfect- this lays down a huge challenge to each of us. It's far less challenging to accept Jesus as God and therefore good and perfect by nature. This is why I suggest the Lord is probing *why* the man called Him "good"- and redirected him towards the need for keeping the commandments and living the committed life in practice. So we have here a passage of deep significance for discussions about the Trinity. The Lord cites the unity of God as meaning that He alone is ultimately 'good', and challenges the man who wanted to treat Him as God as to whether this was not just an excuse for not doing the hard work of following Him in practice.

There is only One who is good. If you would enter life- This is in response to the man's request that to know what to do that he might *have* eternal life. He saw the eternal life as beginning at judgment day, and thought he could do one great act now in order to assure getting that life then. The Lord tells him that he must "Come follow Me" (:21)- it was a way of life rather than one great act of sacrifice that was required. And we enter into life now, in that we can begin living the kind of life we will eternally live. The man had separated the future Kingdom from present life in a way that we are all tempted to. The future begins now in this respect. The Lord Jesus is the Kingdom of God (Lk. 17:21); *He* is the salvation of God rather than anything physical (Lk. 3:6). The Lord paralleled entering into

the Kingdom with entering into “life” (Mt. 19:17 cp. Mt. 19:23; Mt. 18:3 cp. Mt. 18:8). He saw being in the Kingdom as essentially being about a *life* that would be enjoyed.

Keep the commandments- The Lord uses *tereo* for "keep", and the young man replies that he has "kept" the commandments from his youth, using *phulasso* (:20), which more has the sense of 'preserving'. His legalistic mind prides itself on having preserved the statement of faith, as it were; he has not [as the Scribes endlessly feared] added to the commandments but has preserved the correct text. But the Lord uses a word which implies more to obey and live by the commandments. The same mentality is perceivable in the one talent man, who kept his talent in pristine condition- but didn't use it (25:25). One problem with legalistic attitudes to statements of faith is that they can give the impression that the entire duty of man is to preserve them to the letter; when the Christian life is a call to obedience and action, rather than mere intellectual, theoretical preservation of ideas, however correct those ideas may be as theories.

The question of course is why the Lord chose to repeat the last six commandments of the ten commandments. Perhaps He perceived that they had special relevance to this rich young ruler. Harry Whittaker makes an interesting but not totally convincing case that the rich young man here was Barnabas and these commands were very relevant to him as a Levite- see *Studies in the Gospels* chapter 148.

19:18 *He said to him: Which? And Jesus said: You shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness*- Paul's references to the Gospels suggests that he had carefully meditated upon the passages to which he consciously alludes. The fact and way in which he *alludes* rather than quotes verbatim reflects the fact he had thought through and absorbed the teaching of the passages rather than learning them parrot fashion. Here in Mt. 19:18,19 the Lord Jesus combines two quotations from the Law: Ex. 20:12-16 followed by Lev. 19:18. Paul, in a different context, to prove a different point, combines those same two passages, although separating them by a brief comment (Rom. 13:9). This surely indicates that he had meditated upon how his Lord was using the Law, and mastered it so that he could use it himself.

19:19 *Honour your father and mother and, you shall love your neighbour as yourself*- See on :18.

19:20 *The young man said to him: All these things have I observed from my youth*- The record stresses the incongruity and inappropriacy of the young man’s self-righteousness: “The *youth* answered, all these have I kept from my *youth* up”. He was young- and he says that since a young

man he had kept all the commands. Now the Lord doesn't lecture him about self-righteousness, nor does He point out that the young man is way over rating his own spirituality and obedience. Instead, the Master focuses on the positive- as if to say 'You are zealous for perfection? Great! So, sell what you have and give to the poor. Go on, rise up to the challenge!'.

What do I still lack?- Mk. 10:21 provides the Lord's answer: "One thing you *lack* [s.w.]", but the "one thing" was to distribute his wealth and to follow Christ. The two things seem therefore related; it was the wealth which was stopping the following of Christ. The man had come to the Lord asking what great deed he must do to obtain eternal life, and so he was aware of his obedience to the commandments. He obviously felt that obedience to Mosaic law was not going to be the basis of eternal life, and he sensed that there was some great deed he must yet achieve. Therefore "What do I still lack?" shouldn't be read as an arrogant statement that he lacked nothing because he had been legally obedient. Rather is it a genuine question, seeking a concrete, clear and achievable answer.

19:21 *Jesus said to him: If you would be perfect*- The Lord is saying that if the man wants to serve Him on the highest level, then he should sell all and give to the poor. And the man went away from Christ because of that. Because in his pride, he considered he was serving already on the highest level. This introduction of the idea of different levels of service is seamlessly in context with the teaching about 'receiving' the Lord's high standards concerning divorce and remarriage; but the Lord had recognized that not all were able to reach them. And this incident happens in demonstration of this principle. The man could have humbled himself as a little child, and admitted he couldn't rise to that standard of selling all- and yet still begged to be allowed a place as a Christ follower. And surely the Lord would have accepted him, because there is no evidence that literally selling all we have is a global requirement for men to enter the Kingdom. Zacchaeus only have *half* of his goods away (Lk. 19:8). This is, therefore, encouragement for all who feel they can't rise up to the highest standards. There is still a place for them, for all of us- for we all fail to attain them. Only our pride will turn us away because of their existence and our failure to attain them. The incident also functions as a foil for those who think they are in a position to condemn those who don't rise up to the highest level regarding divorce and remarriage- have they, with their perfect marriages, sold all they have and given to the poor? If not, then allow others likewise to live on a lower level in other areas of human life. See on :26 *With God all things are possible.*

Go sell your possessions- We note that the Lord treated each person differently. Jesus approved Zacchaeus' distribution of only half of his

possessions- whilst demanding that the rich young man give away literally all. And He never seems to have demanded that those of His followers who owned houses should sell them. See on :16 *What good thing.* The same principle is seen in His preceding teaching about divorce and remarriage- His ideal standard is not 'given' to everyone, just as it is not a requirement of everyone that they sell and they have and give to the poor. The Lord taught that we receive the Lord's goods [s.w. "what you have"] on conversion to Him (25:14). We resign all, but receive all. By giving away our earthly wealth, we directly receive wealth in Heaven. Lk. 12:15,33,44 make a sustained play on this Greek word: "A man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the *things which he possesses* [s.w.]... sell *what you have* [s.w.] and give alms... [the Lord] will make [such a man] ruler over all *that he has* [s.w.]". Whilst the specific command to the young man to sell all he had and give it to the poor was not in one sense universal, i.e. not a command to every believer, yet the spirit of it (according to Luke 12) is indeed to be followed by us all. We must at least "forsake ['to bid farewell to'] all that [we] have [s.w.]" (Lk. 14:33). The early believers did not 'say' that anything they possessed [s.w.] was their own (Acts 4:32)- Luke surely intends us to connect this with his earlier record of how the Lord had taught that our attitude, at very least, must be that we do not really 'own' those things which we apparently 'have'.

Luke adds: "One thing you lack...". The Lord was quoting from the LXX of Ps. 23:1. Because the Lord [Jesus] is our shepherd, "not one thing is lacking to me". The selling and sharing of his wealth is paralleled by the Lord with following Him. The one thing that was lacking was to shed his wealth *and* follow Christ. To follow Christ, to have Him as our shepherd, is therefore no merely intellectual affair, nor is it a question of legalistic obedience to a set of principles we inherited from our youth. It requires the most painful sacrifices.

And give to the poor- Lk. 18:22 uses the word "distribute". The Lord laboured the point: 'Give, yes go out and distribute the proceeds, to the poor'. Luke again uses the word in describing how the early believers did indeed sell their possessions and 'distribute' to the poor within the ecclesia (Acts 4:35).

And you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow me- Alluded to in James 1:12.

19:22 *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away*- When he understood the *logos*, the essential intention of the Lord's teaching.

Sorrowful- Mk. 10:22 describes him as "sad", literally the Greek means that he became overcast, as the sky clouding over. His joy, therefore, was

because he had wrongly assumed that he could do some simple dramatic act well within his comfort zone, and thus attain an assurance of salvation. But his face clouded over when he realized that he was being called outside of his comfort zone. This is an exact picture of the disillusion which clouds so many once they perceive that the call of Christ is not to a mere social club or to surface level religion.

"He went away" is significant because the entire section starting from chapter 18:1 is purposefully framed so that the incidents connect with each other. The Lord had welcomed the little children to come to Him, and rebuked the disciples for forbidding them. This young man- also a 'little one'- went away from the Lord. The implication is that the little children had more spirituality and devotion to Christ than this man. The exhortation to become like little children therefore meant that whatever stops us coming to Him must be jettisoned- and for this 'young one', it was his wealth.

For he was one that had great possessions- Again Luke's record of the early church alludes here, speaking of how possessions were sold and the money distributed to the poorer believers (Acts 2:45; 5:1 s.w.).

19:23 *And Jesus said to his disciples: Truly I say to you: It is hard for a rich man*- The sense is not simply that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, but that he shall enter with difficulty. The Lord goes on to say that such shall enter the Kingdom only by God's grace and possibility of saving those who do not rise up to the higher levels that He bids us to (:26). In what, then, is the hardness or difficulty- if God is willing to accept our living on lower levels? The difficulty is in not walking away from Christ as the young man did, because of our pride; what is hard is to be like a child, the model throughout this entire discourse, and simply accept God's grace in Christ.

To enter into the Kingdom of heaven- The man walked away, whereas if he had cast himself upon the Lord's grace, or better still, sold what he had and given to the poor, then he could have right then begun to enter into the Kingdom. We begin entering the Kingdom right now; we are, according to another teaching, walking on the road to the judgment, and must get right with our brother who walks on the way there with us. The parable of the camel (i.e. the rich would-be believer) being unloaded of its wealth before it enters the city (Mt.19:23,24) represents a rich man entering the Kingdom (the city = the Kingdom, as in Rev.22:14; 21:2; Heb.13:14; 11:16; a city can also represent believers). If he sheds his riches now, it follows he is then able in some sense to enter the Kingdom now. This mini parable is in the context of Mt.19:21: "Sell that thou hast... and thou shalt have (now) treasures in (the Kingdom of) Heaven".

This is the same idea as in Mt.18:4: "Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child (which necessitates parting with riches etc.), the same is (now) greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven". In these few words is our highest challenge.

Paul had thought deeply about the parables. He doesn't just half-quote them in an offhand way. For example, Paul saw the rich man of Mt. 19:23 as actually one who *wanted* to be rich (= 1 Tim. 6:9,10). So Paul had thought through the parable. He saw that possession of riches alone wouldn't choke a man; he saw that the Lord was using "riches" as meaning 'the desire for riches'. And because "riches" are relative and subjective, this must be right. And therefore the Spirit was able to use Paul's deductions. My point is that the Spirit *could* have used just anyone to write (e.g.) 1 Tim. 6:9. But it was no accident that God chose to use a man with a fine knowledge and appreciation of His Son to be His pen-man.

19:24- See on 7:13.
And again I say unto you- Note the double repetition of this powerful point- that wealth makes entry into the Kingdom difficult.

It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God- I go with the old explanation that this is an allusion to a loaded camel needing to be unloaded of its 'wealth' so that it could squeeze through the pedestrian gate- a call to become human, to realize we are naked before God, and our wealth adds nothing to us. Mark's record uses a term for "the eye of a needle" which the Septuagint always uses for "the holes of the rocks" (e.g. Jud. 6:2; 15:8,11; Jer. 13:4; 16:16), from whence we see the idea of a hole in the rocky city walls.

In the beauty and depth of His simplicity, the Lord comprehended all this in some of the most powerful sentences of all time: *It is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom.* He *must* shed his riches, like the camel *had* to unload to pass through the needle gate (Mt. 19:24). This is such a powerful lesson. And it's so simple. It doesn't need any great expositional gymnastics to understand it. Like me, you can probably remember a few things very vividly from your very early childhood. I remember my dear dad showing me this as a very young child, with a toy camel and a gate drawn on a piece of paper. And I saw the point, at four, five, maybe six. It is *so clear*. But what of our bank balances now, now we're old and brave? It's easier for a camel, the Lord said. Why? Surely because someone else unloads the camel, he (or she) has no say in it. But in the story, surely we must be the camel who unloads himself, who shakes it all off his humps, as an act of the will. And as we've seen, the spirit of all this applies to every one of us, including those without bank accounts.

19:25 *And when the disciples heard it, they were surprised, saying*- A strong term. They were really so shocked that wealth made it hard to enter the Kingdom, implying they were strongly persuaded that wealth was a gift from God and a sign of His approval of a man. This of course was quite foreign to the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and other teaching of the Lord, and Matthew uses this strong term to highlight how far they had been from understanding His most basic teachings.

Who then can be saved?- "Can" translates the same word the Lord uses in the next verse to say that with God, even the saving of the wealthy who don't quit their wealth is "possible"- on the basis, therefore, of His willingness to accept a lower standard of achievement to that He ideally requires. And this is in the context of His offering a lower standard to unconditional forgiveness in chapter 18 (you can not do this if your brother sins against you, and instead drag him through the synagogue disciplinary process), and His demand for forgiveness of adultery (although if you fail in this you can take the lower level and divorce your partner- if it is not 'given' to you to accept that standard).

19:26 *And Jesus looking upon them said to them: With men this is impossible, but*- The Lord maintained eye-contact with His listeners: Mt. 19:26; Mk. 3:5,34; 5:32; 8:33; 10:21, 23,27; Lk. 6:10; 20:17; 22:61; Jn. 1:42. These are all separate occurrences; the fact is really being emphasized. This paying appropriate attention with eye contact is also a good strategy for matching the silences that occur from time to time in any serious conversation. Most of us can tell when another is thinking by observing the eyes, and when they are not their eyes will tell you. The way the Lord Jesus had of lifting up His eyes was something which evidently struck the Gospel writers (Lk. 6:20; Jn. 6:5; 11:41; 17:1 cp. the emphasis upon the eyes of the risen Lord in Rev. 1:14; 2:18; 5:6; 19:12).

With God- The status of *para* God is often applied to the Lord Jesus (Lk. 2:52; Jn. 6:46; 8:40; 16:27; Acts 2:33). The suggestion could be that because of the status of the Lord Jesus with the Father, such gracious salvation is possible which would be impossible if men simply had to have the steel will to obey the Father's ideal principles.

All things are possible- Lifted from the Septuagint of the word to Sarah about the birth of Isaac (Gen. 18:14). Those Old Testament heroes were not merely stained glass figures- our own belief in salvation regardless of wealth is as dramatic as the belief of an old woman that she could have a child. The context here, however, is talking of how those who choose a lower level- in this case, *not* selling their wealth and giving to the poor- can still be saved by God's gracious possibility. This harmonizes with the whole theme of :12, that to some is 'given' the possibility of living on the idea level regarding divorce and remarriage, but if that cannot be attained

to, then God will still accept us. See on :21 *If you will be perfect* and :25 *Can be saved*.

There are at least two instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus is quarrying his language from the book of Job, and shows a certain identification of himself with Job. In Mt. 19:23-26 the Lord explains the irrelevance of riches to the spiritual good of entering the Kingdom, saying that "with God all things are possible" - without money. This is almost quoting Job 42:2, where Job comes to the conclusion that all human strength is meaningless: "I know that Thou canst do everything". It may be that Jesus is even implying that through the tribulation of his life he had come to the same conclusion as Job. See too 5:27-30.

19:27 *Then asked Peter, saying: We have left all*- The family based structure of the first century is hard to fully empathize with from our distance. Family was all. Peter comments that the disciples had "left our own homes" (Lk. 18:28 RVmg.), and the parallel Mt. 19:27 says "left *all*". Your home was your all. To have to leave it for the sake of Christ was the most fundamental thing you could do. Hence the real meaning in the first century of the Lord's response that such converts would receive families in this life, i.e. in their relationships in the ecclesia. And yet the radical call of Christ is no less demanding and intrusive as men and women meet it today, the only difference being that the starkness of the choices is less pronounced today- but just as essentially real.

I have repeatedly mentioned that the material in chapter 19 is strongly related to that in chapter 18. The Greek here for "left / forsook all" is identical to that in 18:32: "I *forgave* you *all*". Peter had balked at the idea of 'forgiving all'. It is easier to 'forsake' [s.w. 'forgive'] all material things than to *forgive* all. This explains why the incident of the rich young man follows the teaching about the need to forgive all. He would not forsake all, just as some would not forgive all. Peter claims to have forsaken all, and yet it's apparent that he struggled with the idea of *forgiving* all, thinking that seven times / day was more than generous enough of him. Likewise one wonders whether Peter had really forsaken all materially- he still had a wife, and apparently his fishing boats back in Galilee, to which he returned after the Lord's resurrection.

And followed You- Just as Peter's claim to have "left all" was perhaps questionable, likewise Peter seems to have under-estimated what 'following Christ' really meant- for the idea of carrying the cross is strongly connected with following Christ (10:38; 16:24). And Peter failed to carry that cross to the end, for he denied the Lord when the going got tough.

What then shall we receive as a reward?- The emphasis is on the word "we". The Lord had taught that the rich needed to give up their wealth if they were to be saved- but God's grace was enough to make even their

salvation possible if they didn't rise up to that higher level. Peter considered that he and the disciples *had* given up what wealth they had. And the Lord agrees with Peter- indeed, there would be great blessings for them in the future Kingdom.

Peter had the impression that by forsaking all and following the Lord, he would somehow benefit. He still had to learn that the carrying of the cross is not to be motivated by any desire for personal benefit, spiritual or otherwise. We live in a world in which religion, like everything else, is seen as a means toward some personal benefit. If we love the Lord, we will follow Him, wherever the life in Him leads us; purely for love of Him, and recognition that His way is the way to glorifying the Father. Peter had left all, but expected something back. For the excellency of fellowshipping the sufferings of the future Saviour, Moses gave up all the riches of Egypt. The Lord responded by saying that nobody who had left all *for His Name's sake* would go unrewarded (Mt. 19:29). The riches, the surpassing excellence of Christ, all the things tied up in His Name, these were not appreciated at that time by Peter. They are enough, purely of themselves, to make a man count all things as dung. Later, he understood this. He told the lame man that the silver and gold which he had was the salvation possible in the Name of Jesus (Acts 3:6). Peter rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and he preached in that Name. There is quite some emphasis on this: Acts 2:21,28; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,30; 5:41. Now he had learnt his mistake, or rather he realized the poverty of his understanding of the Lord. He now found the excellency of the Lord's Name an imperative of itself to witness to it. Likewise "for his name's sake they went forth" in obedience to the great preaching commission (3 Jn. 7; Rev. 2:3).

19:28 *And Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you: You who have followed me*- This is in response to Peter's claim that they had "left all and followed You" (:27). The Lord doesn't include Peter's claim that they had "left all", but rather focuses upon the 'following Me'. This may well have been because He knew that Peter had not in fact "left all" to the degree that Peter thought he had (see on :27). They hadn’t then grasped the idea of what really following involved; they hadn’t in one way or another laid down their lives with Christ. And then there is the problem of “twelve”. Judas didn’t follow to the end, and will not sit upon a throne in the Kingdom. The Lord surely means, therefore: “You who will have followed me…”. Or is that He spoke of “the twelve” as a title for the group of disciples, and what He meant was that even at that early stage He counted their desire to follow Him to the cross as if they had done it? We must see our failing, following brethren likewise. He counted His sheep as following Him (Jn. 10:27) even then, although he knew they were not then strong enough to follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36). The risen Lord especially wanted the women to tell Peter that He was ‘going before him’ to Galilee (Mk. 16:7)- with the implication that even in his weakness and

dejection, He wanted Peter to still try to follow Him and re-live the cross in his life.

The Lord was so generous spirited towards His disciples. He knew that Peter would not follow Him as planned, to the cross- indeed, none of them would (Jn. 13:36,37), but He speaks to them as if they would be successful ultimately in following Him.

In the regeneration- The reference is to the last day, when the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel will be regenerated / restored. But the only other occurrence of the word is in speaking of baptism as "the washing of regeneration" (Tit. 3:5). The Kingdom experience and process begins now- a thought which although common in the NT probably fails to grip us as it should. For is our own depressed and passive spiritual experience today really the Kingdom life as it could be? The Greek word literally means 'the re-naturing'. The final and ultimate change of nature will be at the last day, but the essence of such regeneration begins now.

When the Son of Man- As so often, the term is here associated with the glory and judgment reigning of Jesus. This is because His glorification is on the basis of His having been so human.

Shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones- The Lord foresaw the twelve *who at the time included Judas* sitting in glory upon twelve thrones. The question therefore arises as to whether or not the Lord knew Judas would betray Him, and if He did [as He says He did], then why did He apparently trust Him? Samson trusted Delilah and yet knew on another level she would betray him. This is just a common psychological condition. It helps explain why the Lord Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64), and yet how He could really trust in Judas as his own familiar friend, confide in him (Ps. 41:9), tell him that he would sit with the other eleven on thrones in the Kingdom (Mt. 19:28). This was ever a serious contradiction for me, until considering the Samson: Delilah relationship in depth. A man can know something about someone on one level, but act and feel towards them in a quite different way than this knowledge requires. David likewise must have known Absalom's deceit; but he chose not to see it, for love's sake. "They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things [just as Absalom did in the gate]...but I, as a deaf man, heard not" (Ps. 38:12,13). Paul surely knew how Corinth despised him, how little they knew and believed, and as he himself said, the more he loved them, the less they loved him. And yet in all honesty he could say: "As ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence and in your love to us" (2 Cor. 8:7). Yet the more abundantly he loved them, the less they loved him- not the more abundantly. Yet he saw them as loving him abundantly. One also gets the sense that the Gibeonites' deception was somehow guessed by the elders of Israel, but against their

better judgment they disregarded the tell-tale signs (Josh. 9:7). Or Amasa, taking no heed to the sword in Joab's hand- against his better judgment, surely (2 Sam. 20:10). This is a feature of human nature; and for me so far, the contradictions evident in the Jesus: Judas relationship and the Samson: Delilah relationship are only explicable for me by realizing this. The whole thing is an eloquent essay in the Lord's humanity and the depth of His 'in-loveness' with Judas the traitor. And this Lord is our Lord, the same yesterday and today. Our self-knowledge will be deepened by realizing that we too have this spiritual schizophrenia: it's not that we are spiritual one day and unspiritual the next. We are both flesh and spirit at the very same moment. Appreciation of this will help us cope with the more evident failures of our brethren. It doesn't necessarily mean that they must be written off as totally unspiritual and insincere because of acts and attitudes of evident unspirituality. The Spirit is still there, at the very same moment. Think of how Samson slept with a whore until midnight, and then in faith rose up and was granted the Spirit to perform a great act of Christ-like, cross-like victory over the enemies of God's people. Let's note that when the Lord repeats this teaching at the last supper, He mentions only that the faithful will "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk. 22:30). Surely He realized that 'the twelve' were not now all faithful.

Lk. 22:30 speaks of the disciples sitting eating and drinking at the Lord's table, judging the twelve tribes. The suggestion is that the seats at His table somehow turn into thrones of judgment. In this case the idea may be that being in fellowship with the King means that we are co-rulers with Him; His table of fellowship becomes the basis of judgment for the Israel who refused Him and His disciples. Or in another sense, the seats at His table merge into seats of glory and of judgment. If we are at His table now, we shall be rulers in His Kingdom.

Judging the twelve tribes of Israel- There are many problems in trying to work out the chronology of events at the judgment seat. I suggest they are resolved by understanding that there will be a collapsing of time [and space too, if Einstein's relativity theory is correct] at the day of judgment. This would explain difficulties such as how we and the disciples can come before the judgment throne of glory when we and they are seated there (Mt. 19:28 cp. 25:31); and how the judgment of the world seems (from some Scriptures) to be simultaneous with the judgment of the household.

The Lord has repeatedly spoken in terms of establishing a new Israel, and so He may have in mind here the tribes of spiritual Israel. In Revelation, the disciples form the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem; the entire edifice of the Christian church was built upon men who were so weak in faith, understanding and perception. But *krino* ["judging"] can just as well mean 'condemning'. In this case the Lord's picture would be of the

despised disciples playing a part in the judgment and condemnation of natural Israel who had rejected Christ.

19:29 *And everyone that has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold and shall inherit eternal life*- This list of things to be forsaken recalls the language of the Levites forsaking these things in order to serve God (Ex. 32:26-29; Dt. 33:8-10). The secular disciples again are encouraged to see themselves as the Levites of the new Israel the Lord was creating. Mt. 19:27-30 has a series of extended allusions to the fact that we are now the priesthood. The Lord speaks of how His followers will each have left mother, brother etc. to serve Him, referring to how Moses blessed Levi for forsaking these very things so as to God's service (Dt. 33:9). But He also spoke of how they would forsake houses and lands for His sake and the Gospel's- a reference to the way the Levites resigned their right to physical inheritance in the land for the sake of their relationship with God and the work they were called to. In the same way as Moses predicted that the Levites would be materially blessed even now as a result of their dedication (Dt. 33:11), so the Lord made the same promise. And there is no Christian who has heart and soul committed themselves to the Gospel's work, either in the world or amongst their brethren, who has not lived to see the truth of this definition of priesthood.

Rom. 15:16 speaks of the preacher as offering up his converts upon the altar [note how Acts 11:7 uses the same image of 'offering up' sacrifices to describe preaching]. And this connects with how Paul had earlier spoken in Rom. 12:1 of offering ourselves as living sacrifices in dedication. The aim of the preacher, therefore, is to provoke a sacrificial life in his or her converts, after the pattern of the Master whom they learn of. When we read of 'ministering' in the NT, we are to generally perceive an allusion to the spirit of priesthood; for it was the OT priests who were understood as "ministers". Paul speaks of preaching God's word, both in the world and to brethren and sisters, as ministering (Col. 1:23,25; 1 Cor. 9:13). He saw himself as a minister of the Gospel "that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable" (Rom. 15:16). This is priestly language. Paul saw his efforts for others as preparing a sacrifice. He says that we are *all* ministers (cp. priests) of God, stewards of the true Gospel, and should act appropriately (1 Cor. 4:1). Others gave money to poorer brethren, and again this is described as ministering, priest-ing (Rom. 15:27; Heb. 6:10). Reminding brethren of basic doctrines they already know is another kind of ministering (1 Tim. 4:16). Indeed, Peter says that we *each* have something to minister to each other, there is some way in which we can each serve each other (1 Pet. 4:10,11). We must bear one another's burden, as the priesthood bore the burden of Israel's iniquity (Num. 18:1,23). This is the meaning of priesthood. Paul speaks of his

preaching work as offering up the Gentiles, as if he is a priest (Rom. 15:16)- and in the same figure, Peter is encouraged to preach to Gentiles by killing and eating animals in a peace offering (Acts 11:7). The command that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel is referring back to how the priests had no material inheritance but lived off the sacrifices (Num. 18:11). And for us, the honour and wonder of preaching Christ should mean that we keep a loose hold on the material things of this life. And as we are *all* priests, we are all preachers.

It is perhaps significant, given the theme of 'following' in the records of Peter, that he became well known for 'leading about' his wife (1 Cor. 9:5), as if she followed him everywhere. Peter translated the principles of following Christ into domestic life. There was a time when he may well have 'forsaken' his wife in order to follow Christ (Mt. 19:27-29). But further down that path of following he came to see that as he was to follow his Lord to the end, so he was to be as the self-crucifying Christ to her, and lead her in her following of him that she might follow Christ.

"For My Name's sake" is parallel with "The kingdom of God's sake" (Lk. 18:29) is paralleled with the sake of the Name of Christ by the account here in Mt. 19:29. The things of the Name and the things of the Kingdom were therefore not two different things, rather were they different ways of referring to the same realities.

The Lord's prophecy that the believer receives fathers, mothers, houses, lands etc. only has its fulfilment insofar as the ecclesia is willing to share these things and relationships with its members. But the condition of the fulfilment was not explicitly stated. We forsake all human relationships to follow the Lord Jesus (Mt. 19:27-29). And He promises to compensate for this even in this life. But it depends to what extent we are willing to accept and perceive it. Through meaningful fellowship with our brethren we will find those relationships which we have given up compensated for, even if we aren't physically close to our brethren. In reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt we read: "God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains" (Ps. 68:6). To be set in a new family is paralleled with being brought out from slavery. Part of the process of our redemption is that we are set in a new ecclesial family. This must be a reference to how Israel were brought out on Passover night, where the families and lonely ones had to join together into households big enough to kill a lamb for. The implication of Ps. 68 could be that it was in these family groups that they travelled through the wilderness. The N.C.V. reads: "God is in his holy Temple. He is a father to orphans, and he defends the widows. God gives the lonely a home. He leads prisoners out with joy...". The very house / family of God becomes the house / family of the lonely. Hence the ecclesia *is* the house of God (1 Cor. 3:16). We find true family in the new family of God. By baptism we are "added together" with those others who are likewise saved in Christ

(Acts 2:47 RVmg.). We will live together eternally with the other members of this new body and community which we enter. The links between us within that new family are even stronger than those with our natural family; and hence any division amongst the family of God is the greatest tragedy. What this means in practice is that we must fellowship each other. Even if we are isolated from other believers, one can always write letters, make phone calls, invite others to visit them, attempt to meet others…

"Inherit eternal life" are the very words of the rich young man (Mk. 10:17). The answer to that man's question was that we have to lose now, if we are to win eternally; we must forsake material things if we are to inherit the life eternal. As he was only a young man, it's likely that his wealth had been inherited. He was being told that the greatest inheritance was of life eternal, but this didn't come easily nor by good luck or circumstance, but in response to a lifetime of following Jesus. The things which were to be forsaken include [putting the records in Mark and Luke together with Matthew]: family, brothers, sisters, father, mother, lands, houses etc. These were all the things which the young man had received by inheritance, and to forsake association with his family, on behalf of whom he had received his wealth, would've been crazy and social suicide. It was as crazy as trashing a winning lottery ticket and walking away the same you were before you bought it. But this is the radical calling of those who must forsake materialism in order to inherit eternity. Therefore all seeking for material advantage in this life is surely inappropriate if in fact we are to forsake it even if it comes to us without our seeking it.

19:30 *But many shall be last that are first, and first that are last*- The context is of the Lord having taught that a rich man *must* shed his wealth in order to enter the Kingdom, *but* God's grace is such that He is prepared to save the rich who *don't* do that. With God this is "possible". Chapters 18 and 19 have demonstrated the idea of living on different levels. The Lord had told the rich young man that if he "would be perfect", then he should sell all he had and give it to the poor. In this amazing comment at the conclusion of the section, we learn that in fact "many" who are first in this life *and choose to remain first* shall still be saved, although they will be "last" in the Kingdom. The same word for "last" is used in the parable which speaks of believers having to take the "last" or 'lowest' place around the Lord's table (Lk. 14:9,10). There are and will be gradations between the Lord's people, both now and eternally. Those who are "first" in this brief life, retaining their wealth when they should not, shall be saved by grace but will be the least in the Kingdom. Whereas those who are the least in this life, or make themselves the least, will become the first in God's Kingdom.

CHAPTER 20

20:1 *For*- The context is the end of chapter 19, about the first now being last in the eternal order of things to be established at Christ's return. The parable is therefore about the situation amongst believers in Christ. At 19:1 I presented a chiasmus plan, showing that this parable is to be read in the context of chapters 18 and 19 with their theme of the need to accept and not reject our brethren. That theme is to be found at the very end of the parable- insofar as the harder workers are inclined to reject their brethren who have not worked so long nor so hard. Many of the parables contain their essential point right at the end, and this parable does likewise. The end stress is upon the need for the harder working brethren to accept their weaker brethren, standing as they all do before the judgment presence of the Lord Jesus. The teaching that "the last shall be first" concluded chapter 19 and it concludes this parable (20:16). I suggested under 19:30 that the point of this is that the first in a secular sense *within the community of believers* will be saved only by grace and will be "the last" in the Kingdom. The phrase therefore talks of salvation by grace, and this is the theme of this parable too.

The context of the parable is Peter's comment: "What shall we have therefore?", implying that the disciples ought to get a far greater reward than the spiritually immature rich people who refused to part with their wealth but could be saved anyway by the Lord's grace. The hard workers are thereby to be equated with the disciples and all who consider themselves spiritually superior to others- they "expected that they should have received more" (20:10 NIV), just as Peter likewise expected more. The parable suggests the Lord wanted to specifically reward the lazy and weaker workers. For they are called first to receive their penny- when surely appropriacy would demand that the harder workers were first in line. And yet the parable had wider relevance to the situation in the first century- and today. The harder workers somehow felt unhappy with the *basis* of contract upon which the lazier workers had been taken on and 'saved' by being given the same penny as they. But the basis of salvation was the same- for the zealous and for the lazy, for Jew and Gentile. And that basis was grace. The weaker workers showed perhaps more faith in the Master's offer- because it would've seemed unreal that they would be given the same pay as the stronger, longer workers. But they believed it- which is why they went to do their little work.

The impression we are left with is that the Lord was and is utterly desperate for workers- He is willing to take on any "little ones" prepared to believe His amazing offer. And the same impression is given in the parable of the street people being urged in to the feast. All they had to do was say yes- there was an urgency to fill the house. And surely we in these last days must perceive ourselves as the 11th hour workers, then ones taken on at the very last minute. That alone adequately explains the

mixed bag which comprises the body of Christ in our times, and the weak state of that body.

The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house- AV "A man". The man, the head of the house, is clearly the Lord Jesus. And the Kingdom of God is like… Him. The grace of the Lord Jesus, His manner of being and judging amongst men, is the essence of the Kingdom both now and evermore.

Perhaps we are to connect this parable to the other parable about a *householder* who had a *vineyard* (21:33- the same Greek words are used). Putting the two parables together, God worked so hard to prepare the vineyard so that maximum spiritual fruit would be brought forth. But Israel rejected His prophets and murdered His Son- even though God was confident they would "reverence My Son", actually they killed Him. The wonderful vineyard was therefore given out to the Gentiles, or at least, to others, whom the owner was likewise confident would tend it and bring forth fruit for Him. But this parable indicates that actually He had a major problem getting them to come work in it- meaning that much potential fruit was lost. And the parable of 21:28 says that the vineyard owner's very own sons were not much help either- one refused to go, and only later went to the work; the other said he would go and work, but never did. God's hopefulness for human response, and the tragedy of our paucity of response, is thus brought out yet stronger. It may be objected that the parables appear to be chronologically out of sequence if they are indeed intended to be read together. My response would be that we have in the Gospels a highly abbreviated record of the Lord's teaching, and likely He repeated His teachings and parables many times over. Perhaps the parable of the vineyard owner was told in full [both parables put together] several times, but we have just parts of the parable recorded on two separate occasions.

Who went out- This is emphasized four times (also in :3,5,6). The Greek word is often used about the Lord Jesus 'going out' to men with the Gospel; it is the same word in Jn. 8:42 "I *proceeded forth*… from God" and Jn. 13:3 "He was *come from* ['went out from'] God". Rather than suggesting any personal pre-existence, this is simply a reference to the Lord *during His ministry* likewise 'going forth' to men and women with the Gospel, seeking to engage men in the Father's service. The call of the Gospel, therefore, is not merely to believe the Gospel- it is a call to action, to harvest fruit, to work in the vineyard.

Early in the morning- The very same Greek phrase is used about how the Lord "went out early in the morning" to pray about the calling of the disciples (Mk. 1:35). The language is also used about the earliest disciples 'going out' from the tomb of the risen Lord, also "early in the morning", to bring word to others. The message was ultimately not just passing on information, but an invitation to actually work.

The Lord Himself was noted for rising up early and praying (Mk. 1:35). The observant Jew prayed three times / day, the first and last prayers being merely the recital of the *shema*. Yet Jesus spent hours in those morning and evening prayers (Mk. 1:35; 6:46). Is. 50:4 prophesies of the Lord Jesus that morning by morning, God awoke His ear "to learn as a disciple". That last phrase is surely to signal the intended similarities between the Lord's path of growth, and that of all disciples. The next two verses go on to predict that because of this morning-by-morning teaching process, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Is. 50:5,6). Thus we come to the cross, the life of cross carrying, as the end result of our morning reflections. It was from His own experience that the Lord could bid us take up our cross- *His* cross- each morning.

Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries... This figure of rising up early is surely the basis for the Lord's parable in Mt. 20:1- where God is likened to a man going out early in the morning to hire labourers. It is through the ministry of His word that God does this- each morning that word calls us to labour for Him in His vineyard. Israel didn't notice the huge effort God puts into His word- that every day He rose early and taught them. We can also misunderstand Biblical inspiration to mean that God effortlessly inspired "the original autographs" long ago, and moved on; but actually the whole process is an ongoing and incredible outgiving of God's energy in appealing to us. And... in our mismanaged, weakly disciplined lives, is it so that we don't even make time to read His word daily? If Job could value God's word *more* than His regular daily food... then for us too, regular contact with His word should be part of the atmosphere of life within which we live.

To hire- Rom. 4:4 uses the same word in stressing that salvation is not our “hire” from God, it is the gift of grace. One wonders if Paul is alluding to the parable- to make the point that salvation is a gift, and yet in another sense we each receive a response for our labour. This is in that our labours now will receive eternal recognition in the form in which we will be throughout eternity.

Labourers for his vineyard- Literally, ‘toilers’. There can be no mistaking the Lord’s impression here- response to His invitation is not merely intellectual assent to the truth of Bible teachings, nor is it about painless involvement in the work of His church when, how and how far convenient to us. It’s an invitation to toil and really work in His enterprise. The Lord had earlier lamented that the harvest was more plenteous than the few

labourers (Mt. 9:37,38). He had asked the disciples to pray for more labourers- and the added detail of this parable is that those labourers were still not enough, and were weak [nobody had wished to hire them] and didn't in the end do much work. In this we see how the total conversion of others is limited by the preachers; for the Lord surely implies that there are more potential converts than there are preachers to bring them in. This passage paves the way for the giving of the great commission to us all later in Matthew- to work in the vineyard in harvest time, gathering the plentiful harvest. The "Go…" of :4 fulfils the same function. Elsewhere the Lord likens labourers to the preachers. He clearly saw a primary reason for our calling as to preach and help others to the harvest of the Kingdom. He called us in different ways to labour for and with Him in this work; not to merely passively hold various doctrinal truths in intellectual purity, or to dumbly attend church meetings of whatever sort.

20:2 *And when he had agreed with the labourers*- The Greek carries the idea of entering into a contract- the new covenant. We enter covenant relationship with the Father and Son when we are baptized. Again I must labour the point- that this agreement, this entry into Christ and His vineyard, is not merely a sign that we like the social club or that we assent to the teachings of a particular Christian denomination. It is a personal commitment between the individual and their Lord, to work for Him.

There is the suggestion in the parable of the labourers that the Lord makes some big concessions to human weakness. The Spirit in Paul points the contrast between realizing that salvation is by pure grace, and the wrong perception of salvation as a wage paid for works (e.g. Rom. 6). Indeed, the whole spirit of the Bible is that we should be willing to serve for nothing. The parable of the slave preparing his Master's meal after working hard for him a whole day makes this point. And yet in the parable of the labourers, Christ *agrees* with the labourers for a penny (note his humility, cp. God reasoning with men to accept His forgiveness, Is. 1:18); He asks them to go to work, and then He will give them the wages (cp. salvation). He even describes their salvation as "that which is right", so much did He present the Gospel to them from the selfish level they were then on. The Lord was not ignorant of the line of argument Paul would later present regarding salvation by pure grace. Surely the parable is teaching that the Lord recognizes that in our spiritual immaturity at the time of our conversion, we do need the Kingdom as a carrot, as a motivator. He treats us on this low level initially, hoping we will rise up the higher level of grace. It is possible to witness this spiritual growth in converts, and also in the community of true believers over time; initially we are motivated by the reward of the political Kingdom, but as spiritual perception increases, we grasp Paul's gospel of pure grace. The concept of working and being rewarded decreases, and the recognition of

salvation by grace increases, with the resultant zeal for a truer spirituality.

For a denarius a day- The implication is that the workers were intended to work for several days. But at the end of the first day comes the scene which is clearly intended to be reminiscent of the last judgment. The idea may be that the last day comes sooner than expected and is hastened by the Lord of the harvest.

He sent them into his vineyard- "Sent" translates *apostello*, meaning that all who go to work for the Lord, including the weak who work only one hour, are in fact apostles. We have a specific sense of mission, a sense of having been given a concrete and actual mission in life. That sense is rarely met in unbelievers, and the senses of mission they may have typically only last for part of their lives and become tinged with disillusion. The mission of harvesting men and women for the Kingdom never becomes like that.

20:3 *And he went out about the third hour and saw others*- Here is an insight into how the Lord 'foresees' potential workers / believers, but it is over to them if they respond to the call given. Truly God and His Son are in search of man.

Standing idle- The Greek *argos* definitely means 'lazy' and isn't a particularly positive word to use about someone (Some young widows became *argos*, gossiping and interfering where they ought not because they had nothing better to do, 1 Tim. 5:13; Cretans were rumoured to be lazy, *argos,* Tit. 1:12). The word means literally a non-worker. These men hadn't been hired because they were lazy. The ones the Master was so eager to use were in fact not very good workers, in fact they were non-workers. The hard workers obviously had a problem with the acceptance of these men, and their being treated on the same basis as themselves. This section thus continues the theme begun in chapter 18 and developed throughout this set of material which this parable concludes- see on 19:1. The hard workers equate with the disciples who didn't want to accept or forgive the "little one", the man who would not forgive others their inadequacies and ended up condemned, the big debtor who refused to forgive others their minor debt to him. This parable finishes with the harder workers rebuked and possibly even rejected- and these lazier ones accepted. The point is that the harder workers were disciplined / rejected because of their despising of their weaker brethren.

If we insist on reading *argos* as meaning strictly those without work, then another challenging lesson is presented. All human endeavour and achievement is a standing around doing nothing- compared to the ultimate achievement of harvesting for the Lord, of working with the Lord in His work of bringing people to eternity and to ultimate existence.

In the marketplace- The Lord's preceding usage of this term had been in the context of the work of preaching. He had spoken of how His disciples were like children in marketplaces appealing to others to respond to His message (11:16). But in this parable, the men in the marketplace were inactive and lazy. And yet at the end of the parable, these are the ones who are more acceptable than those who work harder but reject the lazy workers. The similar usage of "the marketplace" in these two parables suggests that whilst it is the Lord's followers who appeal to other children, their 'fellows' in humanity, it is also the Lord personally who works through them to make the appeal.

20:4 *And to them he said: You go*- This again paves the way for the "Go…" of the great preaching commission which Matthews's Gospel concludes with.

Also into the vineyard and- The hint may be that the later workers are working for their Lord on the same basis as the harder and longer workers, even if their achievements and levels of service vastly differ.

Whatever is right I will give you- "Right" translates *dikaios*, a word carrying a distinct moral sense and elsewhere translated 'righteousness'. The idea of the gift of righteousness, that which is right, is at the heart of much of Romans (Rom. 5:17 specifically speaks of "the gift of righteousness"). The penny paid for a few hours work speaks of salvation, granted as an undeserved gift, and yet also somehow 'that which is just / right' because of the way we are counted just because we are in Christ. There was no specific promise of a penny, and yet this was judged by the Lord as 'what was right'. Intentionally, the storyline of the parable leads us to cry out that it is *not* just to give labourers the same pay, when some work far longer and harder than others- at least 12 times longer, in some cases. But it *is* just in the new justice taught by the Lord. The point of the paradox is that human works and achievements are so irrelevant in terms of obtaining salvation, the penny. Rather like the 100 pennies owed to the man who had been forgiven a 10,000 talent debt (18:28).

Preaching is a spiritual exercise for the benefit of the preacher. We could get the impression that the labourers were called to go out into the vineyard because the Lord felt sorry for them, standing idle with no work or livelihood- rather than because He needed them. If this was His motivation, He wouldn't have called anyone at the 11th hour, neither would he have paid them all the same wages if he was only using them for his benefit. God will call His people unto Himself without us doing a thing; and yet we have a responsibility and even a commission to take Christ to the world. The fact God will call His people to Himself anyway does not exempt us from the duty of witnessing; and the process of this witnessing is so often for *our* benefit.

And they went their way- We explained on 19:1 how there is a whole block of material presented in a long chiasmus, and this parable is the closing part of the section which began at the start of chapter 18. It's significant therefore that *aperchomai*, translated here to 'go [a] way', recurs twice in the section. The man with the colossal debt 'went his way' and imprisoned his slightly indebted brother (18:30), and the rich young man 'went away' sorrowful (19:22). In each case, men 'went their way' after having been confronted by extreme grace. The rich man in that despite not wanting to part with his wealth as requested, he could still be saved by grace; the man with the colossal debt who had it frankly forgiven. They 'went their way' into obscurity, unable to accept the grace offered. These weak, lazy labourers went *their* way to harvest at least a few for Christ, believing and clinging on to the Lord's desire to use even them despite their inadequacy.

20:5 *Again He went out*- The very same words used of how the Lord 'again went out' to teach the Gospel (Mk. 2:13).

About the sixth and ninth hour and did likewise- Peri ("about") used in relation to time doesn't have to mean 'roughly at' that time, it could mean that throughout the sixth, ninth and eleventh hours, the Lord searched for workers. In this case we see an indication of His urgent need for workers. The harvest really is there to be brought in, all complaints that 'nobody is interested' are simply a reflection of a serious mismatch between the potential harvest and the approach being taken to harvesting it. Typically great effort is expended on trying to get people to sign up to a denominational position and be regular attenders at meetings- and if that fails, the feeling is that evangelism has failed because the harvest is simply not there, 'nobody is interested'. But the clear impression from this parable and others is that the harvest is indeed there- the problem in harvesting it is with the labourers. The work of harvesting isn't the same as doing a public relations exercise for a denomination. We may or may not succeed in getting folks to sign up for our denomination or fellowship; but the work of harvesting men and women into Christ isn't necessarily the same thing as that. And that work is guaranteed of success.

20:6- see on 22:8.
And about the eleventh hour- The servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. And they get paid the very same wage as those who had worked all day. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. He will take on anyone who is willing to work, no matter how feebly, no matter for how short a time; the fact they are standing there ready and willing to do their little bit is what is important to Him. A man does not usually go out between 4 and 5 p.m. looking for more labourers, with sunset approaching. He must have had

an unusually great need for workers, racing against time to get the harvest in. And this is the very urgency of the Gospel, and the passion of the Lord's desire to get the harvest reaped. God could reap the harvest of the earth, requiring not help from man. But He has chosen to work through men in the preaching of the Gospel, and therefore the number of workers and their zeal reflects the amount of harvest of souls that can be reaped. The eternal destiny of others is therefore seen to depend on our extent of labour in preaching. It's also apparent that the amount of harvest was unreally huge- hence the unusual running backwards and forwards to get more workers. One expects the manager to know the size of the harvest and hire the right number of labourers at the start of the day. But in this parable, he doesn't. The awesome size of the potential harvest out there in this world means that *never* should we conclude that 'nobody's interested'. There is a *huge* harvest out there. And in passing, it can be noted that grapes have to be harvested at just the right time. If they're left even a day too long on the vine, the sugar content becomes too high and they are no use. We can perhaps infer that the parable describes a scene on a Friday, with the Sabbath coming on when nobody can work- and yet it is *just* the right day for reaping the harvest. This makes the obvious connection in our minds- that just before the Sabbath day of the Millennium, in the last days, there is an abnormally huge harvest to be reaped. And this would connect with other Biblical teaching about a great appeal being made to all nations, just prior to the Lord's return. The parable also yields the lesson that those men would not normally work for one hour. We are to imagine those men with families at home who needed feeding. No pay that day, no food. But they were willing to do at least something. And their generous Lord simply pitied their poverty, so he gave them a day's wage- even to the 11th hour workers. And this is the Lord who has graciously hired us. Likewise, no rich King who finds that the wedding of his son will be poorly attended would go out and invite beggars. The element of unreality is that he so wants every place filled. No human King, nor his son, would want riff raff at the wedding, just because his own class of people turned down the invitations. But the King of Heaven is unlike any human king. He wants others to share in the joy of His Son, and absolutely nobody is too low to share; and moreover, He has a compelling desire to fill those places. The implication is that the net is being spread wider and more compulsively as the days shorten unto the supper.

He went out and found others- This parable forms the closing section of the block of material which began at the beginning of chapter 18 and which is arranged in a chiasmus [see 19:1]. The Lord's 'finding' of men to do His work connects with the 'finding' of the lost sheep in 18:13. These men whom the Lord 'finds' are the lost sheep. The parallel is thus between the lost sheep, the child brought into the midst, the man who owes 100 pence, the brother who sins against us… and now, the lazy or weak labourers who are saved by grace. The point of the section is that

they must be accepted- and the parable speaks of how those who have worked harder and longer will have a tendency not to do so. And that tendency may cost them their own salvation.

Standing, and he said to them: Why do you stand here idle all the day?- The implication is almost that they should've gone to work without waiting to be invited. They should've been motivated by the tragedy of an amazing harvest wasting. Or perhaps the question was more rhetorical. Why were they idle? Why had nobody hired them? Because they were weak, lazy, had bad reputations, been fired by other employers, were too old to work effectively… And the Lord wanted them to be fully aware of their inadequacies before He sent them to do His harvesting work. The same is seen in how the Lord made the disciples perceive their own blindness and lack of faith- and *then* gave them the great commission. This is indeed the ultimate qualification for preaching work. And that is taught by the Lord's hand in life, not by Bible colleges or preparatory programs.

The parable of the labourers indicates that the Lord's desire for response to the Gospel will increase as the coming of the Kingdom advances. Apparently He increasingly is the Jesus who understands human weakness. There is an element of unreality in the parable; the servant goes at the 11th hour and hires the men who others had refused, presumably because they didn't look strong enough for the work. This element of unreality serves to highlight the (humanly) irrational zeal of the Lord for the spread of the Gospel in the last days before His return. The parable of the marriage supper explains why this is. We need to enter into the sense of urgency and tragedy which there was; the marriage of the King's son was going to be delayed because the guests didn't want to come. The shame, even anger, of the King (cp. God) and the bridegroom (cp. Christ) need to be imagined; and this really is the feeling of the Father and Son whenever the Gospel is rejected. And time and again it happens, from Sunday School kids to those hundreds who every year complete Bible study courses and turn away from the call.

20:7 *They said to him: Because no one has hired us-* They answered honestly, recognizing that in the urgency of harvest, nobody had hired them. Their answer implied a recognition of their weakness- through old age, mental issues, laziness, bad reputation, physical weakness or disability. But it is twice emphasized that they "stood" in the marketplace and did not *sit* there, as is common in marketplaces in the Middle Eastern harvest time sun. Their saving feature was that they were willing to work, and they recognized their weakness; and they believed that they would be given an appropriate reward by this strangely gracious employer. This is so important, and forms almost the only precondition which the Lord requires to work with men. The Lord surely knew why they had not been hired. They had been there all day- so He had surely seen them when He

had gone out looking for workers earlier that day. His question to them was therefore rhetorical. He wanted to elicit from them a recognition of their weakness. We also sense that as He would have noticed them earlier in the day, He as it were was lowering the bar because He was as it were driven to do this by the chronic lack of labourers and the unexpectedly huge harvest. The same lowering of the bar just before the last day, the final end of the harvest, is seen in the parable of the street people being urged in to attend the majestic supper.

The Lord had earlier spoken of the disciples as labourers in the work of the Gospel, who were worthy of their hire (Lk. 10:7; Jn. 4:36 s.w.). The connection with that teaching is in that the Lord was inviting the disciples to see themselves as those who had been first hired, and was warning them that the potential harvest was so great that He was taking on other workers whom they would be tempted to despise. This is exactly the theme of the entire block of material which began with their rejection and despising of the little ones at the start of chapter 18.

He said to them: You go also into the vineyard- AV adds: "And whatever is right I will give you". He imputes righteousness to His weak workers, so that payment for a day's work becomes that which is "right" for those who have only worked one hour.

20:8 *And when evening came*- The Lord's coming is likened to the dawn in Mal. 4, here to the sunset. The day of opportunity for service ends, and yet in another sense the sun arises heralding the eternal day of God's Kingdom.

The owner of the vineyard said to his steward- AV "The Lord". The Lord of the vineyard is presumably God, and His "steward", the duty manager, is the Lord Jesus.

Call the labourers- *Kaleo* is used both of the calling of men and women to the Gospel in this life, and also of the final call to judgment. In responding to the call, we are actually embarking upon a journey to judgment, and therefore as the Lord elsewhere explains, it is absurd if we uphold differences with our brother on that journey. We are on our way to judgment- that should humble us and impart a sense of urgency to every moment of this journey. Mt. 22:3 speaks of how the Lord's Angelic servants "call them that were bidden". But "call" and "bidden" both translate *kaleo*. The called ones are further called- to judgment.

And pay them their wages- At the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis

of works; but the judgment is of works in order to teach us self-knowledge. And this is why there will be a 'going through' of our deeds. In this life, we see ourselves in a dark mirror; but only when the Lord appears will we clearly see ourselves face to face. This coming to true self-knowledge will only be possible through the judgment process. There is indeed a 'wage' paid for Gospel work; each man shall receive "his own reward [s.w. "hire"] according to his labour"- but that "reward" is the fact that a man's work 'abides' through the fire of the final judgment (1 Cor. 3:8,14). So whilst the hire / reward / wage is on one hand salvation, it will also be unique to each of us and directly in proportion to the success of our work with others. If they enter the Kingdom, then that will be an aspect of our eternal reward, and thus Paul can say that his eternal "crown of rejoicing" is the likes of his Thessalonian converts standing approved at the final judgment (1 Thess. 2:19). So often, allegiance to a particular denominational way of thinking hinders believers from this work. They may read these words and find the idea somewhat strange, because they feel they have never brought anyone into the group they belong to. But the group we ultimately belong to is the body of Christ. The commission to take the Gospel to the world and baptize them is given to each of us. And so we do well to ask ourselves the question: 'How many times have I ever asked someone if they want to be baptized, offered to baptize them, and baptized someone?'. Fear of eldership displeasure and rejection from what is little more than a church social club has hamstrung so much such witness.

Beginning from the last to the first- The giving of the payment begins at the last, which is an element of unreality in the story. The message may be that this was in order to teach the longer and harder working labourers that the wage really was a penny a day for each worker. The purpose of the judgment process will be for our benefit, and one of the hardest lessons for Christ's people is to accept that others who worked less than us are really also saved to the same extent and by the same grace as we are.

20:9- see on 25:23.
And when they who were hired about the eleventh hour came- I mentioned earlier that *peri* with time clauses can mean 'throughout'. The payment was at the twelfth hour; some had been hired at various points throughout the eleventh hour, meaning that they had worked far less than an hour. It outrages all human works-based justice to think that they received the same as those who slogged twelve hours. But this is to affront our sense of justification by works, and to demonstrate to us that salvation cannot be on the basis of works but rather on the basis of the contract / covenant which all by grace have entered into. And the parable has an even more demanding twist in its end stress, whereby those who considered this was unreasonable and felt they should be given more for

their superior work are in fact rejected for thinking that. If indeed "Go your way" means they are fired from the Master's service.

They each received a denarius- No employer really pays all workers the same amount as the 11th hour worker; no creditor would really cancel debts simply because the debtors can't afford to pay, and take nothing at all from them; no father would really give preferential treatment to a wayward son over a son who had never disobeyed him. But the point is, God acts in the very opposite way to how we do or would do. His grace to sinners makes no human sense. And He asks us through these parables of His Son to walk out against the wind and follow His example in our treatment of sinners. Our own natural sense cries out that he who works most should have the most pay; but the unreality of the parable teaches us that this principle is set aside in the way God deals with us. *Any* gift from the Father and Son is by grace alone. The elements of unreality in the parables often bring out the extent of God's grace. The fruit farmer [=God] asked His worker [= the Lord Jesus] to cut down a barren fig tree. But this worker had such fondness for the tree, he was so unusually concerned for it, that he pleaded that it be given some more time. This reflected the Lord's love for Israel, a love beyond all reason. Likewise, which wealthy person would ever arrange a banquet and invite the very dregs of society to it? Here is the Father's amazing grace. Sometimes we have to fill in the details [another feature of the Lord's amazing stories] in order to perceive this grace. The younger son, for example, demanded his share of the inheritance; and thus he lost his name, forfeited any claim to family membership, and openly showed that he did not wish to be part of his father's family. And yet he was received back with such grace and longing by the Father.

This addition of *ana* ["every man"] is to underline that they each, every one individually, received their pay. The sense would be conveyed quite adequately without the addition of this word, but the Lord wished to remind us of how each of us will personally meet the Lord at judgment day, and we will behold each of those whom we considered the little ones, inferior workers or believers to ourselves, receiving their rewards. The public aspect to the judgment process is several times brought out- e.g. the rejected will walk naked and others will see their shame (Rev. 16:15).

20:10 *And when the first came, they supposed*- NIV "they expected". The connection is clearly to Peter's expectation that he and the disciples who had forsaken what they had should be rewarded more than those who had not done so (19:27). We are led by the story line to sympathize with their position- our sense of human justice cries out against such an approach, whereby the harder workers were rewarded the same as the slacker and shorter workers. But that outcry is intended. Because the point is, that we are the colossally indebted man, saved by grace; the 11th hour workers who were too weak and lazy to do much for their Lord.

This parable forms an appropriate conclusion to the material which began at the start of chapter 18. The despising of the little ones by us is simply because we have failed to perceive that *we* are the 10,000 talent hopeless debtor, *we are the man*… *we* are the weak workers, etc.

Yet *nomizo*, "supposed", is the verb of the noun *nomos*, the law. They believed it was their legal right to receive more than the later workers. But they had "agreed" in contract for a penny a day (:2). The law was not at all on their side. They only came to this new and very twisted view of their rights by observing the Lord's grace to the weaker, shorter workers. Their eye or outlook became evil because of the Lord's goodness. We too can come to assume that salvation is our right, failing to maintain any sense of wonder at God's grace to us.

That they would receive more, but likewise each received a denarius- This again is particularly appropriate to Peter, who had to be forced to consider carefully whether he did in fact love the Lord "more" [s.w.] than others (Jn. 21:15).

20:11 *And when they received it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying*- The word is repeatedly used concerning Israel's murmuring against Christ (Lk. 5:30; Jn. 6:41,43; 7:32; 1 Cor. 10:10). These who murmured against Christ's grace at the last day were therefore, we can conclude, under the influence of Jewish legalism and a sense of superiority to others. The tension is between them murmuring at the very moment in which they "received it".

Those hired into the vineyard first "supposed (on judgment day) that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house... but he answered one of them (what's the significance of this?) and said, Friend (a description of the faithful, Jn. 15:15; James 2:23), I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is... I will give unto this last, even as unto thee" (Mt. 20:10-15). If the penny represents salvation, the harder workers only started questioning once they saw, to their amazement, the weaker and shorter workers receiving a penny. They received the promised reward of salvation, but couldn't understand the principles on which the Lord rewarded the weaker servants. If the hard working faithful will have a problem with this even at the judgment, how much more now?

20:12 *These last*- The Lord answers the question "Are there few that be saved?" by insisting that we personally strive to enter by the narrow door

(Lk. 13:23,24). This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33). John's Gospel ends with Peter yet again being distracted by the possible spiritual destiny of his brother John- 'What about *this* man?' was answered by the Lord with an appeal to Peter to not worry about that but instead "You- follow Me". And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. We should rather be like the weak old labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment day clutching their 'penny' [of salvation], thinking "I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this… this coin… this is a day's pay". But we will be there. You and me. For all our doubts and fears, our chronic lack of self worth, for all the inward, unspoken struggles to believe and understand, that nobody knows nor even notices. We will be there. This is grace, and this will be grace. Truly there is all joy and peace through believing these things, "that ye may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). Paul was ever aware of his own proneness to failure. He saw himself as tempted to be like the man in the parable who thought he should have more, because he had laboured more abundantly than the others (Mt. 20:12 Gk. = 2 Cor. 11:25).

Have spent- Clearly the harder workers believed that there was to be a direct connection between work and reward. And the purpose of the story is to debunk that idea.

Only one hour- The labourers had been brought into the vineyard at various times. It was the scandal of the 11th hour labourers which so stuck in the gut of the original workers. And those 11th hour workers, at least in chronological terms, are us- called in these very last days. We therefore can see ourselves as the recipients of maximum grace- for we are hardly the strongest or most functional of the generations of Christ's servants, more focused as we are on internal grievances than on the massive work of getting the amazing harvest in.

But you have made them- This is precisely the same word used earlier in the verse to speak of how the weaker workers had 'worked' or, literally, 'made' only one hour. By accident, almost, these complaining labourers had stumbled upon the salvation by grace and imputed righteousness which Paul spells out in Romans in so many words. The strangely gracious Lord of the harvest had 'worked them' as worthy of a day's pay; He had imputed to them the work of a whole day when they had only done a fraction of that. And still the workers didn't get it. The story ends with them still in confusion. Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); the wise

virgins, apparently selfishly, won't give any oil to the others; some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?); some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25).

Equal to us- It was on this basis that they were all made "equal" before the final judgment. The basis of their unity, therefore, should have been- and indeed *is*- the fact that our salvation is by imputed righteousness. Peter surely learnt the lesson of all this when he spoke of how to the Gentiles had been *given* by God the 'like' [s.w. "equal"] *gift* which had been given to "us", the Jewish disciples (Acts 11:17). In this sense the dimensions of the new Jerusalem are "equal" (Rev. 21:16 s.w.).

Who have borne the burden of the day- The same words used for carrying the burden of the cross and of the sins and failures of others (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17; Rom. 15:1). It can be no accident that here in Mt. 20 the Lord goes on to speak of His cross and the need to participate in that death through carrying the cross. Whenever we behold the cross, surely we are left with the deep impression that 'I would not have gone through with this'. But that is the burden we are to carry, and no amount of other works or attainment of standards can compensate for that. The disciples thought they could so easily carry that cross (20:22 "we are able"), just as these workers were sure that they had borne the required burden and should be rewarded for it. But in the light of the cross and of the demand implicit within it to likewise suffer in the salvation of little ones, the hard workers had carried nothing. Their salvation too was to be on the basis of total grace.

And the scorching heat- This is the language of the day of judgment (2 Pet. 3:10,12; James 1:11). These hard workers had been through nothing- they had not been through the day of judgment, at which acceptance will be proportionate to our acceptance of other little ones.

20:13 *And he answered and said to one of them*- The personal nature of the judgment is emphasized, as we saw in :9,10 where it is twice stated that the payment was given to each individual.

Friend- This term could imply that for all their blindness and unfounded sense of superiority over their brethren, these workers were still acceptable with the Lord. But the same word is used in 22:12 for the man who is condemned because he thinks his own clothing is good enough for the wedding, and will not take the garment of righteousness offered him; and it is also used by the Lord concerning Judas the betrayer (26:50). These more negative associations of “friend” must be considered together with the possibility that “Go your way…” means effectively ‘You’re fired!’. The idea that we are superior to our brethren because we achieved more

than them is so obnoxious to the Lord that it may be the basis for the condemnation of such people. That is the undoubted implication and possibility. The structure of the parable leaves it somewhat unclear, because indeed the issue is unclear. The Lord may forgive the unforgiving, show grace to the ungracious- and save them. This would indeed be in line with His grace. But on the other hand, we are to understand that such arrogant and exclusive attitudes warrant condemnation before Him at the last day.

Note that before the Lord of the harvest, *having received* the 'penny' of salvation and Divine nature, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Robert Roberts wrote that he was certain that the only response of the saints once they are given Divine nature will be to break down in tears. And I agree with him. And the passion of Jesus may mean He does likewise. Being Divine doesn't mean you don't cry- in whatever way Divine beings cry. Which is why, in some ways, there are tears in Heaven as we pass through our vales of tears down here. Some will be in the Kingdom who have big questions about the justice of God even then (Mt. 20:12,13 "friend"); some will sit in the Kingdom in "shame" because they thought they were greater than other brethren (Lk. 14:9- cp. the elder brother?)- i.e. self-imposed shame and embarrassment; some remonstrate that a highly rewarded brother already has ten pounds, and surely doesn't need any more exaltation (Lk. 19:25). This all suggests that even after our acceptance at the judgment, we may be more 'human' (or whatever word I should use) than we may now imagine. More emotional, more seeking towards understanding, with a greater potential for eternal growth, than perhaps we have thought. Divine nature doesn't mean being passionless. Whichever hymn writer called the Kingdom "passionless renown" just, quite frankly, got it wrong [or was trying too hard to rhyme his words]. Because God *is* passionate; and we will share *His* nature.

There is even here the possible implication that some who will be accepted by the Lord who even at their acceptance at the judgment have wrong attitudes towards their brethren. Thus before the Lord of the harvest, those who thought they had worked hardest complained that those they thought had done less, were still getting a penny. They were rebuked, but they still had their penny (cp. salvation; Mt. 20:11). The subsequent comment that the first shall be last might imply that they will be in the Kingdom, but in the least place. Likewise the brother who takes the highest place in the ecclesia will be made with shame to take the lower place (Lk. 14:9). Or the bitter elder brother, angry at the Father's gracious enthusiasm for the worthless brother, is addressed by the Father (God) in language which is relevant to the Lord Jesus: "Son, thou art ever

with me, and all that I have is thine" (Lk. 15:30). These sentiments are elsewhere expressed about the Lord Jesus. Is the implication that bitter elder brother is still in Christ and accepted in Him, even though his attitude to his brother is not what it should be? The least in the Kingdom will be those who break commandments *and teach men so* (Mt. 5:19); but the least in the Kingdom will be counted greater than John the Baptist was in this life (Mt. 11:11). The simple message is that there will be some in the Kingdom who simply weren't very obedient in this their day of probation. Admittedly, these details are capable of other interpretations. But bear these points in mind, especially if you ever struggle with the apparent harshness of some Christians you may meet.

I do you no wrong- The grace shown by one to another can be perceived by a third party as a personal attack upon that third party. But that is just an illusion, a game of the mind- and yet it explains why there is so much anger with the Lord because of His grace to others. The hard workers felt the Lord was personally doing them wrong- when instead He was giving them exactly what He had promised and what they had hoped for.

Did you not agree with me for a denarius?- The question arises as to what exactly the Lord was supposed to give these men beyond a penny. Likewise, the Lord can give us no more than salvation, the penny. The fact He may give it to those we consider far beneath our level, doesn't mean that somehow He must give us more than salvation.

20:14 *Take*- This is a slightly strange way of talking about a penny which the Lord had given to the worker. It might imply that the worker had thrown it down on the ground in protest. Or the sense of 'take away' which is in the Greek may suggest 'Take it and go away from Me', lending weight to the possibility that the subsequent "Go your way" is effectively a firing of the man from the Master's service- a hint that the penalty for superior thinking concerning little ones is in fact rejection by the Lord.

That which is yours- Salvation will be intensely personal, it will be as it were 'our very own'. Having been faithful in what the Lord entrusted to us in this life, we will receive at the day of judgment "that which is your [very] own" (Lk. 16:12).

And go your way- This could be interpreted as meaning 'You're fired'. Harry Whittaker was a great fan of this view in his *Studies in the Gospels.* Perhaps the hard working labourers were sent packing by the Lord because of their complaint at the others getting the same payment for what they considered to be inferior work to theirs. If the parable is meant to be read in this way, then it seems so sad that those hard working men (cp. brethren) were *almost* saved, but for their attitude to their brethren.

It is my wish to give to this last even as I gave to you- Here and in :15, *thelo*, "I will", doesn't mean 'I want' but rather to choose, to be disposed to. The idea connects with the conclusion in :16, that the saved are those who are "chosen". These ideas of a sovereign undeserved gift, the will of God, Divine choice and election [*elektos* is the word used for "chosen" in :16] are all found again in Romans, where Paul makes the same point more pointedly and directly: Salvation cannot be by works, but by grace. And the element of election and predestination within the final algorithm of human salvation is proof enough that works are not and cannot be of paramount importance.

20:15 *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own money? Or is*- This is another connection with the earlier part of the chiasmus which began in chapter 18. In this case, to the question of 19:3 as to whether it is "lawful" [s.w.] to divorce a wife for any reason. The Lord's answer had lifted the question to higher levels, by arguing that the spirit of the law was to forgive marital failure without limit. He is expanding upon that thought here, by teaching that the spirit of 'law' is to accept the weak believer, the little one, the sinner, with no regard to their works but rather upon the basis of their having entered and 'agreed' to the covenant of grace. He imputes righteousness to His weak workers, so that payment for a day's work becomes that which is "right" for those who have only worked one hour.

Your eye evil, because I am good- A figure for mean spiritedness (Dt. 15:9; Prov. 23:6). They should have been generous spirited, and the connection is clearly to the colossal debtor in the parable at the end of chapter 19, who should've been generous to his indebted brother. God's grace to us, the honour of having served Him so long, should mean that we are happy at the inclusion of those who appear far less than us, which is the context of this entire section of material which began in chapter 18. And the Lord's words here are so tragically and frequently true to observation in spiritual life. The grace shown by some towards others who are clearly morally or doctrinally weaker provokes untold anger towards those who are showing the grace. This explains why otherwise nice natured believers can shake in rage, use expletives and behave with unnatural anger towards those whom they perceive as opening the circle, weakening the boundaries behind which they have hidden, by welcoming in the children, the little ones who are apparently so far beneath other believers in faith and behaviour. Their eye clouds over as evil as they behold the grace of others. There are Biblical examples of this, but the hatred towards the Lord Jesus Himself, hatred unto the death of the cross, is proof enough. And the same path was followed by men of grace such as Paul and Peter.

"Is your eye evil, because I am good" was quarried from Jonah 4:2-4, where Jonah is also asked a similar question after his bitterness that God

had allowed Nineveh to repent. We must be aware that such self-righteousness and uncomfortableness at the repentance of others is a feature of our very essential nature. The Lord Jesus overcame this aspect of His nature superbly.

The pureness of the grace of the Lord Jesus is hard to plumb. He knew that the extent of His grace would cause others to stumble. The element of unreality in the parable of the labourers shows this. He hired the labourers no-one else wanted, the old and weak workers, some of them only for an hour, and still gave them a day's pay. They must have walked away from the pay table with their heads spinning, scarcely daring to believe what they held in their hands- a matchless picture of the response of the faithful after learning of their acceptance at the day of judgment. But the outlook of those who felt their salvation (the penny) was less by grace than the others became bitter: "Is your eye evil, because I am good?". In saying this, the Lord was referring back to Dt. 15:9, which warned Israel not to have an evil eye towards their poverty stricken brother (cp. the unwanted labourer) who asked for a loan near the time of the year of release, when all debts were cancelled. In the year of release, Israel were "to remit every private debt... and not *demand* it of thy brother" (Dt. 15:2 LXX). This is behind Mt. 18:28, where Christ speaks of the man who demands repayment from his brother. The Lord is implying: You should live in the spirit of the year of release all the time, giving without expecting. Lk. 6:35 has the year of release in mind, in the idea of lending without expecting anything back. This only happened in the year of release. "Is thine eye evil, because I am good" is therefore saying that the Lord's grace towards the poverty-stricken labourer had provoked an "evil eye" in the others, they somehow felt that they were having to give to him, that they were standing to lose by his acceptance. Yet, as the Lord implies, this is a nonsense attitude. Of course we don't stand to lose anything by another's acceptance! And it's possible to reason that it was those 11th hour labourers represent the accepted, whilst the complainers are rejected ("Go thy way" has been read by some as meaning they were fired whilst the others were taken on permanently). But with what superb accuracy does He get right inside the future mentality of many in His ecclesia! How very true this parable has been time and again in the history of our community. Discussion of and practice of the idea of grace has provoked untold bitterness amongst those who live less by grace.

20:16 *So the last shall be first and the first last*- The entire section beginning in chapter 18 has taught that those who refuse to forgive and accept the spiritually weak- will in fact be condemned. And yet the section also speaks of the possibility that they will be saved, just as the rich are told to sell what they have and give to the poor, if they “will be perfect”- otherwise they will be condemned. But the Lord says that salvation even in that case is “possible” with God, by grace. Therefore the section concludes on the same note- on one hand hinting at the condemnation of

the hardest workers because of their despising of their weaker brethren, whilst on another hand suggesting that they shall be in the Kingdom, although "last" in the Kingdom, due to their superior attitudes.

For many are called but few chosen- AV. This is the conclusion to the large chiasmus of material which began at 18:1 (see on 19:1). The conclusion is that salvation is partly on the basis of predestination- some are simply chosen, others aren't. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Paul speaks of choosing and predestination in the context of seeking to persuade believers that salvation is by the gift of grace and not according to works- and he could well have been prompted to that thinking by the Lord's usage of 'choosing' here. God uses language in a relative sense in order to emphasize something. Thus we read of many being saved (Gen. 22:17), yet in another sense few will be saved (Mt. 7:14; 20:16; Lk. 13:23). Relative to the wonder of salvation, many will be saved; but numerically, the figure will be small, from the perspective of this world. See on 11:30; 25:19.

20:17 *And as Jesus was going up*- This could refer to the uphill journey, but 'going up' was a technical term used for going up to Jerusalem, particularly to keep a feast- Passover, in this case. Mark adds: "And Jesus went before them, and they were amazed; and as they followed they were sore afraid".

To Jerusalem- From Jericho, 19:15. Hence they went "up", uphill to Jerusalem. These small details all support the position that the Gospels were written by eye witnesses and were not created many years later by people who were not present. They were going the opposite direction of man in the parable of the Good Samaritan, who went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho. We may be able to infer that the Lord intended us to read that man as one who was not going in the way of the cross, who was going away from Jerusalem rather than towards it- and who was still saved by the grace of the Samaritan / Jesus.

He took the twelve disciples aside- The implication is that there were others travelling with them, and the Lord wished to explain the reality of the cross to the disciples alone.

And on the way he said to them- It could be inferred that "the way" is the way to Jerusalem and the cross; the disciples were following Jesus in that "way" without appreciating what it really involved and where it ultimately led, and that can be true for us too.

20:18 *Listen, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be*- This

was stating the obvious, but He wanted them to perceive their part in the journey to the cross which He was making; for His path to death and resurrection was to be theirs, as it is ours too.

Delivered to the chief priests and scribes; and they shall- The Greek means literally 'to hand over'; the idea of betrayal was maybe implicit, but not as explicit as in the English word 'betrayed'. It's the same Greek word as in :19, translated "deliver". The word is very common on the lips of the Lord, as if He saw the moment of 'handing over' as the quintessence of all His sufferings- the hand over from God's Providential protection to the powers of darkness.

Condemn Him to death- Exactly fulfilled, using the same Greek words, in Mk. 14:64.

20:19 *And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify; and the third day he shall be raised up*- The Lord's predictions of His sufferings are detailed. The question arises as to whether this knowledge was beamed into Him by Divine revelation, or whether He worked it all out from Old Testament anticipations and prophecies of Messiah's sufferings. All the details could indeed have been understood from the Old Testament.

20:20 *Then…*- So often, the Lord's predictions of the cross are responded to in most unspiritual ways, as if the message really failed to penetrate. As with us today, people turned off at the message of the Lord's death. Whenever this happens, we must enquire as to *why* we turn off; for it surely has a psychological basis. Why does out attention wander so easily when reading or hearing discussed the crucifixion passages? The psychological, subconscious reason may well be that we realize that whatever is true for the Lord is to be true for us; His death there is the pattern for our death to self today. And we would far rather not be reminded of that.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, kneeling before him and asking a certain thing of him- The mother of James and John. We can identify her with Salome, who was likely the mother of Mary the Lord's mother (see Jn. 19:25; Mk. 15:40; Mt. 27:56). They were His cousins, and in the culture of nepotism in which they lived, it would be normal for them to have some honourable place in the future Government of their relative. But the Lord's answer was that such fleshly connections were irrelevant; there was no short cut around drinking His cup and suffering with Him. So often, having predicted His cross, the disciples become obsessed with petty issues; just as we can, right before His cross.

20:21 *And he said to her: What do you desire?-* These are the very words the Lord goes on to use to the blind men in :32 as He left Jericho, and to the blind man He met as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:41). The similarity in the stories of the blind men He spoke to is surely for the same reason as His repetition of "What do you want?" both to them and to Salome and again to her sons. It's all to build up the impression that He is asking people to focus upon what their dominant desire really is. And such an approach is not unknown in depth psychology today. The Lord uses the same word for "want" in asking the crippled man if he 'wanted' to be made whole (Jn. 5:6). Of course he did, and the Lord knew it. So His question was to elicit in the man a sense of what his dominant desire really was. The Lord raised him up, and went on to comment that as the Father raises up people, so His Son enlivens whom *He* wants [s.w.- Jn. 5:21]. The 'want' of the man and the 'want' of God's Son coincided, just as can happen for us all- if our dominant desires are His. Therefore later in Jn. 15:7 the Lord almost comments on the incident with Salome by saying that if His words abide in us, then we shall ask what we wish [s.w. "want"] and it shall be done [s.w. 'do']. There was no blank cheque promise, as Salome and her sons had wrongly implied. It was often His style to focus people on what they were asking for, encouraging them to verbalize and thus define their deepest desires. This is why He made as if He would go further on the way to Emmaus, why He appeared to be sleeping during the storm, and in another storm appeared to intend to walk past the disciples (Mk. 6:48). All this was to elicit from His people an awareness of their need for Him. He works the same today, through providential circumstance in our lives, to make us ask ourselves what we really and essentially want. He has just spoken in detail of His sufferings, and so His question was rhetorical. 'If I am going to do all that for you- what else could you ask for?'. The wonder of salvation for us as sinners is such that we should see all our other requests in that context.

Mk. 10:37 makes it clear that the brothers themselves went on to request this, having tried to manipulate the Lord through the use of a female. Here is a classic example of where reading the entire Bible gives us a wider and fuller perspective. But a caveat needs to be sounded about such intertextuality, as it is called- the practice of interpreting a text in the light of other Bible texts. Of course, to get the wider and truer picture, this is a quite necessary and legitimate way of studying the Bible. But remember that the vast majority of believers over history have been illiterate. They heard the Gospels read to them. The text as it stands spoke to them- there are no Divinely inspired footnotes which signpost us to one of the parallel Gospels for the fuller picture. The easy use of computer-assisted analysis of the Biblical text is unique to our age, but one downside of this is that it can too easily be assumed that such endless chasing of connections with other Scripture is in fact how the text was originally designed to be read. It clearly was not. The fact the text of the entire Bible stands up to such analysis and indeed glows with glory

under it- doesn't mean that this is the only nor even the intended way to receive the text. The ability to perform such detailed intertextuality just wasn't there for the illiterate; they heard the text of the Gospels as it was read, and there was a message within the text as it stands which they were intended to perceive.

She said to him: Command- Literally, 'say'. The same word is used in describing the Lord's response; He "answered *and said* [s.w.]" (:22). What He gave or said was not directly what she wanted, but rather an invitation to die with Him, and to share in whatever consequences arise from that.

That in your kingdom- Mk. 'In your glory'. This confirms that she had 19:28 in mind, where the Lord had promised a sitting on thrones when He sat "in the throne of His glory". The mother of James and John wanted them to have great reward in the Kingdom. The Lord's basic answer was: 'Take up my cross, follow my example, focused as it is on getting others to the Kingdom' (Mt. 20:21,27,28). They were to be to others examples of selflessness. In the parable of the labourers, the hard, all day workers came expecting their pay; they were sent away, it could be, in rejection. But those whom the parable appears to commend worked having made no agreement nor mention of the reward they would receive. Thus when James and John clamoured for a reward in the Kingdom, they were told instead to go away and serve; this was what it was all about, being the minister of others, serving for nothing- not badgering the Lord for a reward in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-26).

These my two sons may sit, one on your right hand, and one on your left hand- She surely had in mind the Lord's recent assurance that the twelve would sit upon twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (19:28). But even that wasn't enough. She wanted even more. The record leaves us gasping at her: 'What? Even that promise, and the prediction of the Lord's death for you- still not enough for you??!'. This is intended to put all our requests and dominant desires in a different context. If we have been promised the Kingdom and the Lord has died for us- then what other dominant desires should we have? Surely none. For those things should be the dominant issues within us.

Mark records the brothers asking: "Master, we would that You should do for us whatsoever we shall desire"- presumably trying to tie the Lord to His words in 18:19 about the successful prayer of "two… who should agree as touching anything they should ask". But of course the Lord's context there was quite different. It was about restoring the lost to the way to the Kingdom. So often we likewise can seize hold of the Lord's words and try to twist them to as it were manipulate God into response. This sort of thing goes on *ad nauseam* in many Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, taking Bible phrases out of context and

aggressively holding God to words He never uttered in the context required of them by the audience. They had the focus all wrong- they wanted to be in the Kingdom "for us". Our motive for wanting to be in the Kingdom needs to be analysed. Is it for God manifestation, or mere human salvation from death that we are interested in [to paraphrase a well known quote from John Thomas]?

20:22 *But Jesus answered and said: You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink*- The statement that men 'know not' is usually and extensively on the Lord's lips in a negative sense. We can therefore read Him here as deeply disappointed in her. Note how the Lord uses the plural 'you'; He clearly saw that the question was being asked by the sons through their mother, and the parallel records show Him asking them directly what *they* really wanted. "We know not what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. 8:26) seems to be some kind of allusion back to the mother of Zebedee's children asking Christ to get her two sons the best places in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:22). He basically replied 'You know not what you pray for', in the sense of 'you don't appreciate'. It may be that Paul in Rom. 8 is saying that in our desire for the Kingdom, in our groaning for it, we don't appreciate what we ask for as we ought, yet Christ nonetheless makes powerful intercession for us to this end.

The cup that I am about to drink?- The Lord's death was therefore His cup, and also His 'baptism'. He asks us to be baptized with His baptism and to regularly drink His cup in the memorial meeting. These things are easily performed, and yet they are an agreement to die His death. We too can far too easily say "I am able...", when like the disciples, we fail to perceive the horror of the cross and what is being asked of us. We therefore participate in these symbols, these metaphors, with bowed head, deeply aware of our likely failure to carry the cross to the end, but grateful for our participation in *His* cup and baptism, the One who did in fact die the death of the cross.

And to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?- AV. Note the present tense compared to the future tense of "the cup that I shall drink of". And yet in Lk. 12:50 He speaks of the baptism that He must still be baptized with in crucifixion. His death on the cross was in essence lived and died by Him throughout His life. This is why the prophecy of His death in Isaiah 53 is also quoted about experiences during His life. And there is an ongoing element to baptism, just as Israel were baptized "in the cloud and in the sea" as they passed through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1), and yet lived beneath the cloud throughout their wilderness journey- as if their baptism was ongoing. We likewise die and resurrect with Christ in an ongoing sense as we die to the flesh and progressively experience His new life breaking through into our mortal experience (2 Cor. 4:11). Note too how Paul speaks of baptism in the present tense in Rom. 6:4- we *are* buried with Him by baptism, although Paul has just said in Rom.

6:3 that we *were* baptized as a one-time past even. If Paul were simply referencing the point of their baptism in Rom. 6:4, he would have said 'We *were* buried with Him'. The sense of Col. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 12:13 may be similar- "By one Spirit we are all [present tense] baptized into one body". The whole language of baptism by the Spirit surely suggests a process rather than a one time event of immersion in water.

The Lord spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... I *am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand. He speaks of "the cup that I *shall* drink of, and.. . the baptism that *I am* baptized with" (Mt. 20:22). This sheds light on four occasions in John's gospel when the Lord appears to use tenses in a confusing way. He speaks of how He *will* go to die on the cross, but that in a sense "I am" there already.

They said to him: We are able- The Lord surely remembered their childlike over confidence when He Himself prayed for that cup to be "able" (AV "may" s.w.) to pass from Him so that He didn't have to drink it (Mt. 26:42). Yet the Lord is so generous spirited to them. He says that they will indeed be "able" to drink His cup (:23)- but the places of honour in the Kingdom were solely for the Father to give. He alludes to this in telling Peter that he was not "able" (s.w.) to follow Him to death on the cross at that time, "but you shall follow Me afterwards" (Jn. 13:36). We would likely have told them to take more seriously the Lord's predictions of His death by crucifixion which He had just uttered, and be more realistic about their own failure to suffer and die like that. But He is so more positive and gracious.

The Lord Jesus Christ's sensitivity to our thinking that we really have borne His cross comes out here. Those men, with all their unspirituality, could quite coolly state that they wanted the highest place in the Kingdom, and could say with confidence that they could shoulder the cross of Christ. The Lord's reply was gracious and generous spirited indeed: "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup" - 'when you're a lot more spiritually mature', He could have added. We *sense* rather than are explicitly told His sensitivity to men thinking they can shoulder His cross; for He alone knows what the cross of Christ entailed and entails. And in speaking of our own sufferings, we too need to learn these lessons, and compare our sufferings against Christ's with the utmost caution, with the sensitivity to *His* feelings, recognizing that we must act as men and women who have been *counted as if* we shared His death, and not as those who have actually "resisted unto blood (in our) striving against sin". To confidently identify some of our brethren as tares is only one example of the way in which we can hurt our Lord's feelings, by acting and thinking in ways which are only appropriate for He who did actually carry the cross.

20:23 *He said to them: You shall drink*- Seeing even the Lord baulked at drinking that cup in Gethsemane, this is an incredibly positive comment to make. But none of us, including the twelve, die the death of the cross as Jesus did. He may have seen this as true insofar as by baptism into His death, His personal death and resurrection are counted to us, as if we have participated in it. As we reconstruct in our own minds His death, every fibre in our being cries out: 'I would not have endured that'. The wonder is that by baptism into Him, His death, that death, even the death of the cross, is counted to us. And with that we should be content, rather than seeking for grandeur in the resurrection age as the disciples were doing. When it came to actually giving the twelve His cup to drink, the Lord invited them: "You- drink all of it" (Mt. 26:27). The force of *pas* there appears to refer to all of the cup, the whole cup- rather than inviting all of the disciples to drink, because it was surely axiomatic that they were to all drink it. The Lord was saying that He counted them as having fully drunk His cup- a cup which He Himself flinched to take. This is the degree to which we are in Him and counted as participating in His death by reason of our status "in Him". Another possibility is that the Lord spoke these words specifically to the twelve and envisaged that each of them would die through crucifixion- although whether they did is not historically confirmable.

My cup indeed- John's equivalent of this is the Lord's word that unless we drink His blood and eat His flesh, we can have no salvation (Jn. 6:53). This therefore has reference to our participation in His death, and our symbolic acceptance of this in the breaking of bread. To drink the Lord's cup is parallel with partaking at the Lord's memorial table in 1 Cor. 10:21. The breaking of bread means many things, and each time we do it we may likely focus on different aspects. But it is not easy for us, or it should not be easy for us. To drink that cup can never be done in a blasé spirit of 'Yes, we are able'. Rather with humbled hearts do we accept that our being counted as having participated in it is by grace alone. Peter was amongst those who thought he was able to drink the Lord's cup, and yet the Lord had to rebuke Peter for seeking to deter Him from drinking it- "Put up your sword... the cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (Jn. 18:11). Peter's desire for the Lord not to drink it was psychologically rooted in his recognition that the Lord's cup was to be his cup.

But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand- When the disciples foolishly sought to have what they thought were to be the favoured places at His right hand and His left, the Lord could have answered: ‘You foolish people! Those on my left hand will be condemned!’. But He graciously didn’t comment on their glaring error. He pushed a higher principle- that we should not seek for personal greatness, seeing that God is the judge of all (Mt. 20:23). Yet sadly, so much of our preaching has been solely concerned with pointing out the errors of others without being sensitive to

what little faith and understanding they *do* have, and seeking to build on it.

Is not Mine to give- A profound rebuttal of the primitive and mistaken equation of Jesus with God which is found in Trinitarian theology.

But it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father- A specific future is being prepared for each of us in God's Kingdom (22:4; 25:34; 1 Cor. 2:9; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"), a unique place prepared in the Kingdom for us by the Lord's death (Jn. 14:2,3) and yet *we* are likewise being "prepared" (s.w. Lk. 1:17,76; 12:47; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 19:7; 21:2 "His wife has *prepared* herself"). God is preparing a unique destiny and role for each of us in His Kingdom, but that preparation work is in terms of how we are being prepared in this life. Therefore all our present experiences are specifically intended to prepare us for the kind of person and role we shall eternally have. In this lies the ultimate significance and meaning to human experience if we are indeed Kingdom people. A huge amount of intense preparation is being packed into a very short space of time in this life. The lack of meaning and significance attached to even is what causes the depression which dogs each secular person, especially as they grow older. The Lord's point was that He was going to the cross to prepare places for them all in the Kingdom (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.). He had just predicted His death. This was where their focus was to be, rather than seeking something for themselves.
It's often been commented that God is beyond or even outside of our kind of time. God pre this present creation may have been like that, and He of course has the capacity and possibility to be like that. But it seems to me that particularly in connection with those with whom He is in relationship, He chooses to not exercise that possibility. Instead, God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Time and again we read of how God says He is "shaping evil against you and devising a plan" against His enemies (Jer. 18:11; Jer. 26:3; Jer. 49:20,30; Jer. 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). For the faithful, He says that He is making plans for them for good and not for evil, "to give you a future" (Jer. 29:11). The Lord Jesus had this sort of thing in mind when He spoke of how the Kingdom will have been being *prepared* for the faithful from the beginning of the world (Mt. 25:34; Mt. 20:23).

John the Baptist was to "prepare" the way for the Lord's coming- evidently a process- in reflection of how God had been working a long time to "prepare" [same Greek word] the way for His Son's coming (Lk. 1:76; Lk. 2:31; Lk. 3:4). We likewise, in our preaching work in these last days, are working in tandem and in step with God. The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence "The Lord has both planned and done

what He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon" (Jer. 51:12; Jer. 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; Is. 37:26; Zech. 1:6; Zech. 8:14).

20:24 *And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation concerning the two brothers*- This suggests that the favour asked was asked secretly. The Lord sensed or overheard their anger, and called the group to Him (:25). The ebb and flow of the disciples to and from Jesus is noted especially in Matthew, probably another indication of their own weakness which formed such a major part of their witness. For the ideal was to abide in Him, to constantly follow Him, and not come to Him and then go from Him in squabbles and jealousies amongst ourselves.

20:25 *But Jesus called them to himself, and said: You know*- This is in response to the anger of the ten against the self-seeking manipulation of the two. He now taught them the spirit of absolute servanthood as an answer to feeling resentful against the unspirituality of our brethren. Even if they are indeed so terribly wrong and simply 'don't get it', as the two brethren clearly didn't, our response should not be anger but rather servanthood towards them. This is all to be found in the implication of the word "But...".

That the rulers of the Gentiles- The *archon*, literally, 'the first'. The Lord had just taught in the parable of the labourers that a principle of His Kingdom was that the first were to be last.

Lord it over them- Gk. *katakurieuo*. Literally, to be *kurios* over, to be as Lord over. His idea was that if He is our *only* Lord, then there can be no lording it over others even when they are clearly unspiritual as the two brethren were at this time. This is where our belief in the Lordship of Jesus really cuts deep. For we naturally would like to think that we are superior to those who 'don't get it' about the spirit of Christ. But we are to see Him as total Lord, and ourselves as servants. Our natural anger and indignation at others' weakness is to be replaced by servanthood. And yet the body of Christ is littered with the wreckage of believers angry with others who refused to serve them but rather stormed out from them or rejected them- rather than staying to serve them, realizing that they are under the Lordship.

The style of leadership / control known in this world isn't to be exercised by the elders of God's flock (Mt. 20:25,26; 1 Pet. 5:3); ecclesial organization shouldn't reflect the structures and practices of big commercial organisations, e.g. Leadership is to be based upon spiritual attributes and the ability to change and convert the lives of others, rather than secular skills such as fund raising, computer literacy, management etc. Yet sadly many ecclesias and Christian organisations seem to confuse the difference between management skills and spiritual leadership. The two things aren't the same. An executive director of a company may very well not be the right brother to lead an ecclesia. The Greek language is

full or words containing the compounds *kata*- and *arch*-, implying power over others, as part of a hierarchy. The leaders of the Roman world used these terms (Mt. 20:25), as did the synagogue leadership. But never does scripture use these kind of words about those who are 'elders' in the true ecclesia. It's a pointed omission. On the other hand, there are many *sun*- prefixes: fellow-worker, fellow-citizen, fellow-soldier, fellow-heir etc. The New Testament emphasis is certainly on what we have in common rather on the fact that in practice some are more capable of organising, or deserve especial respect for their evident spirituality and "for their work's sake". And the teaching of the Lord Himself was more concerned with how to follow Him than how to lead others. Likewise, there were many contemporary Greek words used to describe religious gatherings, e.g. *heorte, synodos, koinos*. But instead the word *ekklesia* is used, meaning a gathering together of town citizens with equal rights to discuss a matter. This is how the word was understood at that time.

And their great ones- The *megas*, the mighty, the strong, the superior. The context is the sense of spiritual superiority felt by the ten against the spiritual weakness of the two brethren and their mother.

Exercise authority over them- They have *exousia*, power, control, over their inferiors. It is the Lord Jesus who is *the* Lord, and who has this *exousia* uniquely over His followers and indeed the whole world (Mt. 7:29; 9:6; 21:24; 28:18 etc.). For us to be indignant and superior against the unspirituality of our brethren is thus to usurp the unique role of the Lord Jesus. Quite rightly should we refer to Him as "the Lord", for this is who He must be in daily life and thought. The failure of others does give us in a human sense this *exousia*, this control, power and superiority- but the Lord goes on to say that it must *not* be so amongst us (:26), we are to resign this for servanthood. The Lord repeated His teaching here almost verbatim in Lk. 22:25- and He states it there immediately after predicting that one of the twelve would betray Him. He did so because He did not want them to be angry and superior over even Judas- He wanted them to instead resign those feelings for servanthood.

20:26 *It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you*- This is in the singular- for "let *him* be your minister". The Lord may not be intending 'If any of you wants to be the greatest, then be the servant'. He may instead be developing the theme of His absolute and unequalled Lordship by saying that *the one* who shall be great shall be the minister- and He had solely Himself in view. He knew that He was to be the greatest in the Kingdom, the one with ultimate and total *exousia* (see on :25). And the path to that was through servanthood, and He invited His men to likewise participate in that servanthood.

Must be your servant- The idea may be an appeal for the disciples to allow the Lord to be their minister. This appeal had to be repeated at the

last supper, when He wished to wash their feet, to be the ultimate servant, and Peter didn't want to "let Him" be his minister. So instead of thinking about what they could personally get out of the Kingdom [as the two brethren], or being spiritually superior over their weaker brethren [the ten], they were to instead accept the Lordship of Jesus and His ministration to them. And the form in which He was supremely a servant was in His death on the cross. And yet as so often, the Lord is speaking to Himself on one level, as well as to the disciples on another level. He is the one who to be great had to make Himself a minister of all, and yet He invites all those in Him to pass through the same process. For all that is true of Him is to be true of us. Hence He goes on to say that "Even as" He ministered, so should they (:28).

One of the commonest allusions to priesthood in the NT is the idea of ministry. Time and again, the Old Testament speaks of the priests *ministering* in the priest's office. The priests are specifically called God's ministers (Is. 61:6; Jer. 33:21; Ez. 45:4; Joel 1:9,13; 2:17). The early Christians would have heard and read many of the New Testament references to ministers and ministry as invitations to see themselves as a new priesthood. The Lord said that we should aim to be a minister, a priests, to every one of our brethren, not expecting them to minister to us, but concentrating on ministering to them (Mt. 20:26). This is exactly against the grain of our nature, and also of the concept of religion we find in the world. People *expect* to have others spiritually ministering to them. They expect a priest-figure to do all their thinking for them. But our Lord said that we are each other's priests, we're not here to be ministered ('priest-ed') to, but to minister, and give our lives in service to each other.

When James and John asked to have the senior positions, the Lord didn't rebuke them; he just told them that the greatest would desire to be a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of all (Mt. 20:20-28). The utter degradation of the cross, and the Lord's willing humbling of Himself to accept it, is a pattern for all who would take up His cross. The "servant of all" would make no distinctions concerning whom or how he would serve; such servanthood was a complete and unqualified act of surrender. And this is taken by the Lord as a cameo of His mindset on Calvary. In conscious allusion to this, Paul could speak of how he had become a slave of all men, that he might help some to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19). He was a slave of the Gospel, a slave of the kind who was lower than the least of all others, i.e. a slave of all (Eph. 3:7,9). He didn't preach himself, but rather preached that he was a servant to all his brethren, for the sake of the fact that he was in Christ, the servant of all (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus he almost advertised his servant status; he preached himself as a slave. Paul wished to be perceived by his brethren and the whole world as merely a slave of Jesus (1 Cor. 4:1). In our talking to each other, or in our writing, it does us good to analyse how many personal pronouns we use; how much we are preaching

ourselves rather than Jesus Christ. Any who may appear to be leaders or organisers are serving *Him*, who debased Himself to that depth. There can be no room *at all* for any sense of superiority amongst us. We are servants *of all*, not just of those individual brothers or ecclesias whom we happen to get on well with.

20:27 *And whoever would be first among you*- The *protos* (chief) amongst the disciples was clearly the Lord Himself. So again, the Lord may not necessarily be inviting His followers to seek greatness in the future Kingdom, but rather inviting them to focus upon His Lordship and achievement through His upcoming death. Instead He may have Himself in view- the One who is to be chief is to be the servant of the disciples, which the Lord did through His death on the cross. And it is His death there which is the context for this whole teaching, seeing He has just given a detailed prediction of it. However, the Lord's teachings often have reference to both Himself and to the disciples, and we have noted a number of times where He seems to have specific reference to Peter. For Peter was the *protos*, the chief disciple, according to Mt. 10:2 [s.w.]. And within the Lord's words there is the nod to Peter that he must learn the spirit of servanthood if he is to be worthy of that special calling as the leader of the pack which the Lord clearly had in mind for him. The Lord has just had a lot to say about the *protos* being last in the preceding parable of the labourers, using the word three times in 20:8,10,16. He is perhaps answering the question which arises from that parable: How practically can we be the last? The answer is by serving as He served, by identifying ourselves with the "last" labourers rather than the "first" who thought they were spiritually superior over their weaker fellow labourers.

The Lord Jesus was the supreme example of spiritual ambition in daily life. When the disciples debated about who would be greatest in the Kingdom, Christ said that "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be... servant of all" (Mk. 9:34,35). Christ was the "servant of all" because He *desired* to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It was this ambition which motivated His endurance of the daily cross of His life: "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: *even as* the Son of man came... to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:27,28). He was drawing on the ideas of Hos. 13:1, where Ephraim exalted himself when he humbled himself to speak to God with the trembling of a true humility. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by men in His death (Is. 53:3); the same word occurs in Dan. 4:17, concerning how Yahweh will exalt the *basest*, the least esteemed, to be King over the kingdoms of this world. That made-basest man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted. Peter had his eye on this fact when he asks us to humble ourselves, after the pattern of the Lord, that we might be exalted in due time (1 Pet. 5:6). Christ desired greatness in the Kingdom, and so can we; for the brighter stars only reflect more glory of the Sun (1 Cor.

15:41). This very thought alone should lift us up on the eagle wings of Spirit above whatever monotony or grief we now endure.

Shall be your slave- Consider the influence of Christianity on the Greek language of humility. The Lord taught that the leaders, the great ones, in His Kingdom, would be the humble servants (Mt. 20:27). Christ spoke of himself as a humble King, which would have been a contradiction in terms to the first century Greek mind. Consider the following commentary by Alan Hayward: "The ancient Greeks had no time for humility. In fact, their language didn't even have a word for it until well into the first century... the early Christians evidently had to coin a word for it. It's a clumsy, long word, made by sticking together the Greek word 'low-down' and the Greek word 'mentality'. The sudden appearance of this new word in Greek literature during the first century is generally attributed to the influence of the early church" [Alan Hayward, *The Humble King*, 'The Bible Missionary' No.131, January 1994].

20:28 *Even as the Son of Man came*- If the Lord was speaking of Himself as the One who was to be the minister so that He might be great, it is possible that verse 28 is a commentary from Matthew rather than the words of the Lord- pointing out that in fact the Lord had Himself in view in the preceding verses.

Not to be ministered to- Surely the Lord develops this teaching when He characterizes the rejected as insisting that they had never missed an opportunity to minister unto Him personally (25:44). Putting these teachings together, perhaps the Lord means us to understand that He did not come to be personally served, but rather does He 'come' to us in the form of His needy brethren, each encounter with them is an encounter with Him. People did of course minister to the Lord in His life (27:55; Mk. 1:31; 15:41; Lk. 8:3 s.w.), but He surely means that He didn't come *so much as to be ministered to* as to Himself minister to others. In this the exquisite beauty of His Lordship. He is indeed Lord, but He didn't come to be personally treated as Lord but rather His psychological focus was upon what He could do for others. And this is His comment upon the desire of the two brethren to have a grand place in the Kingdom "for us", they were seeking something for themselves, whereas the example of the Lord which they were to follow was of focusing upon serving, rather than having an eye upon the reward.

But to minister- The Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever. His focus in His life was upon serving others, and yet the word is used of how He who served at the last supper shall also 'come forth' [s.w. "the Son of Man *came*", Mt. 20:28] to "minister" to His people at the future Messianic banquet (Lk. 12:37).

And to give his life as a ransom for many- The Greek *lutron* is only used in this place in the NT, although the LXX uses it for the Hebrew *pidion*, the ransom payment for human life (Ex. 21:30; Num. 3:49-51; Num. 35:31). The word means literally 'to loose'. The idea may be that something [a life, an eternal life] was potentially prepared for the "many" which was tied up [by human sin], which the Lord's death would unloose and make available. But why use this particular term in this context? The connection is clearly with the idea of being a servant, a slave of the lowest order. And what did they loose? The sandals of the guests at meals, after which they washed their feet. There is clearly a connection of thought between the Lord's teaching here and His washing of the disciples' feet at the last supper, whereby He visually fulfilled the picture of being a servant and not being ministered unto, despite Peter's objections. His unloosing of the disciples' sandals and cleansing their feet, dressed as He was on the cross, having laid aside His outer garment and being clothed only with a loincloth, was all a prefigurement of His death on the cross. He invited us all to do as He had done- to participate in His death by dying for others that they might live. And that has various fulfilments day by day, in self control, not demanding from our brother, forgiving, rebuking, caring for, teaching... telephoning, emailing, and so forth.

20:29 *And as they went out from Jericho*- The healing of the two blind men as they left Jericho must be compared with the healing of Bartimaeus as He left Jericho (Mk. 10:46), and the healing of a blind man as He approached Jericho (Lk. 18:35). These accounts are not in contradiction. One of the two blind men was Bartimaeus, and he is the one Mark focuses on. The healing of the first blind man is indeed described in the same terms as the healing of the other blind men, but the similarity of the language is in order to demonstrate how the Lord worked in the same way in different lives at slightly different times. And there are other examples of incidents repeating in Biblical history but being described in similar language. We are left with an abiding impression that what happens in our lives has been in essence repeated in other lives. And surely the healing of the first blind man inspired the others to take the same leap of faith, just as we are to be inspired by the way others have responded to the Lord's hand in their lives.

A great crowd followed Him- The section began with the idea of the Lord now being on His journey to death in Jerusalem, and bidding the disciples follow Him on that path. The crowd followed, but not in that deeper sense. The same term is used of the healed blind men- they too "followed Him" (:34), but the implication is that they followed Him with understanding. The parallel Mk. 10:52 records that one of the men, Bartimaeus, "followed Jesus in the way". That last phrase would surely be redundant unless it was pregnant with some deeper meaning, and that meaning surely rests in the idea of following the Lord in the way of the cross which led to Golgotha.

20:30 *And two blind men who were sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying*- Mk. 10:52 speaks of how at least one of these blind men followed Jesus "in the way", using the same word *hodos* as used here for "the way". Their sad position, sitting maybe for years day by day *para* or by, next to "the way", was in fact putting them in a position when at the right time, they could get up and follow the Lord along that "way". See on :34 *Followed Him*.

Lord, have mercy on us, you Son of David- These were exactly the words of the two blind men of 9:27, who were likewise cured as the Lord "departed" from a town, just as here the cure happened as He departed from Jericho. The similarity and connection is obvious. From God's side, we see how He works according to pattern in the lives of people. And humanly, the blind men had somehow passed on to other blind men the truth that there was mercy / grace in the Son of David, which could be manifested in the restoration of sight. In this lies the significance of the fact that according to Lk. 18:35, another blind man had very recently said exactly these words and made exactly this request as the Lord *approached* Jericho. Far from being [as supposed by the critics] a jumbling up of material by uninspired writers, we see rather the development of a theme- that blind men at various places and times approached the Lord with the same words, and made the same connection between His mercy and Him being the Son of David. They may simply have thought that as the Son of David, He had the characteristics of David- which included remarkable mercy and grace to his enemies. We also see how once a community is broken into with the Gospel, it spreads within that community, expressed in the words and concepts which that community understands, and in the style which originated with the first ones in the community who accepted the Gospel. I have seen this happen in communities of the deaf, Gypsies, HIV patients, ethnic minorities under persecution, language groups etc. And so it happened amongst the blind beggar community in Palestine. Such communities have amazing links to each other and paths of communication.

The connection between "the son of David" and "mercy" is surely rooted in the description of the promises to David as "the mercies [*chesed*] of David" (Is. 55:3; Acts 13:34; 1 Kings 3:6; 2 Chron. 1:8; Ps. 89:49 "The mercies which You promised unto David"; Is. 16:5 "In mercy shall the throne be established... in the tent of David"). These promises were utter grace; "mercy" translates *chesed* , which is about the closest the OT comes to the NT concept of grace. David rejoiced in this *chesed* / mercy shown to him (2 Sam. 22:51; 2 Chron. 7:6; Ps. 101:1). Solomon pleaded for grace on the basis of the fact that God had shown such covenant mercies to David (2 Chron. 6:42 "Remember the mercies of David"). The mercies of David surely also refer to God's mercy, the mercy of grace, shown to David in forgiving him the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah- he

begged for forgiveness on the basis of God's "tender mercies" (Ps. 51:1). It could be argued that David's forgiveness was on account of his pleading for the mercies shown to him in the Davidic covenant to be continued to him. For in that covenant God had promised that *chesed* would not depart from David (2 Sam. 7:15), and David therefore begs for forgiveness on the basis that grace / *chesed* would indeed not be withdrawn from him (Ps. 51:1). From all this, David pleaded in crisis towards the end of his life to fall into God's hands because "His mercies are great" (2 Sam. 24:14). In response to the *chesed* ["mercy", or grace] shown David, he too was characterized by humanly senseless *chesed* to his enemies in the family of Saul (s.w. 1 Sam. 20:15; 2 Sam. 2:5 "you have shewed this kindness / *chesed* unto Saul"; 2 Sam. 3:8; 9:1,7) and to Hanun his Ammonite enemy (2 Sam. 10:2 "I will shew kindness / *chesed* unto the Hanun"). What is so impressive is that the network of blind men, from Galilee to Jericho, had figured this out, or at least part of it. They saw the connection between grace and David, and were inspired to throw themselves upon the grace of David's Messianic Son. There was in those times [as there is in much of the world today] a deep belief that blindness was the direct result of sin (Jn. 9:2). These blind men almost certainly felt that their blindness was a result of their sin, and so they felt a moral need for forgiveness, so that the blindness would be lifted. According to Mk. 10:46, one of the blind men was called Bartimaeus, literally 'Son of the unclean'- doubtless this was what he had been dubbed by others, for no Hebrew mother would have named her son that. And they believed that Jesus could indeed cleanse them, morally forgive them, and thereby restore their sight. This would explain why they screamed [Gk.] "Have mercy on us!". This was a moral request; they didn't simply call out for healing.

20:31 *And the crowd rebuked them*- This is yet another example of where the Lord is presented as eager to accept, when men [including disciples] are more eager to reject. The same word has just been used in 19:13 for how the disciples rebuked the little ones from coming to the Lord- and were in turn rebuked. The impression is that in the disciples' exclusivity, they weren't being [as they supposed] more spiritual than the world around them, but rather were they being simply as that world. Soon afterwards, the Pharisees told the Lord to "rebuke" His disciples, and He replied that it was impossible for them to "hold their peace" (Lk. 19:39,40). These are all words and phrases taken from this incident. Now it is the disciples who refuse to be quiet, and it is the Pharisees who want them to be quiet. Again the point is made that the desire to silence and exclude others is from the world, and not of Christ. The Lord's acceptance of people is consistently painted by the Gospels as being far more inclusive and extensive than that of men. The human tendency to reject and erect barriers is simply not there in Christ.

That they should hold their peace; but they cried out the more, saying,

Lord, have mercy on us, you Son of David!- This fits with my comment on 20:21 *What do you want?*, in that this could be seen as piquing their sense of urgency for Christ.

20:32 *And Jesus stood still and called them, and said: What do you desire I do for you?*- See on 20:21 *What do you want?* The Lord a way of focusing men upon their need. Thus He would have passed by the desperate disciples as they struggled in the storm, He would have gone further on the road to Emmaus, and He asked the blind men the obvious question: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" (Mt. 20:32). He only partially cured another blind man, to focus that man's mind on the faith that was needed for the second and final stage of the cure (Mk. 8:23-25). He elicited from the father of the epileptic child the miserable childhood story of the boy- not that the Lord needed to know it, but to concentrate the man on his need for the Lord's intervention (Mk. 9:21). He wanted them to focus on their need: in this case, for sight. He let Peter start to sink, and only then, when Peter's whole heart and soul were focused on the Lord, did He stretch forth His hand. The Lord deliberately delayed going to see Lazarus until he was dead and buried; to elicit within His followers the acuteness of their need. And was He *really* sleeping in the boat with the storm all around Him? Was He not waiting there for them to finally quit their human efforts and come running to Him with faith in no other (Mk. 4:38,39)? Only when men were thus focused on their desperate need for the Lord would He answer them. The Lord further focused men's need when he asked the lame man: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (Jn. 5:6). Of course the man wanted healing. But the Lord first of all focused his desire for it.

20:33 *They said to him: Lord, that our eyes may be opened*- The one thing they wanted was to see. Those healed blind men are types of us. True understanding (seeing) should be the one thing we want. "Wisdom is the *principal* thing; therefore get wisdom" Prov. 4:7). See on 20:21 *What do you want?* This was obviously a rhetorical question, and it succeeded in the intention of making the men verbalize their dominant desire. Likewise the Lord works with us to make us focus and understand what is our dominant desire- and then seeks to reposition that focus. In this section He has done that by placing all human desires and requests in the shadow of His death for us. For how could we want anything 'extra' after He has done that for us, with all it enabled.

20:34 *And Jesus, being moved with compassion*- So often we read this, indeed the Greek word is only used for the compassion of Jesus during His ministry; and it is never in itself because the object of the compassion had some great spirituality or was somehow worthy of that compassion. Rather was it basic pity, which is the idea in the Greek; pity at the human condition. It is exemplified in how the Samaritan had compassion upon the wounded man, and how the Father has compassion on the prodigal

(Lk. 10:33; 15:20). In this case, as explained above, the blind men did indeed have quite some spiritual insight. But that of itself didn't elicit the Lord's compassion. The Lord who is the same yesterday as today was and is simply moved by human need- and responds.

Touched their eyes- Which were likely secreting ritually unclean emissions. Again the Lord shows an eagerness to identify with human uncleanness rather than avoid it. He could, after all, have cured the men in a different manner. This was the same manner in which the Lord had cured the two blind men in 9:29. The critics love to see here a confusion in reporting a singular incident twice. But it seems perfectly likely that the Lord rewarded the fact that these men had heard of the faith of the other blind men, come to share it- and therefore the Lord treated them likewise. There is a continuity and similarity in the way in which the Lord works in human lives, which is why our sufferings are designed so that we can share what we learnt from them with others who are suffering in the same way (2 Cor. 1:4). It likewise explains the otherwise uncanny similarities which there are between the experiences of believers, both with those contemporary with us and personally known to us, and others in the past or of whom we read in the Bible.

If indeed there are major bloomers in the Gospels and in the Bible generally [as the critics suggest regarding these incidents of healing the pairs of blind men], then naturally the question arises as to how reliable the Biblical text really is. Liberal Christians tend to argue that some is, other parts aren't. But no basis is given for deciding which parts are reliable and which are not. Nor does there seem any reason why God would inspire some parts of the Bible but not others. But the wonder is that the Bible, and the Gospels particularly, can be analysed at depth and found not to contradict but rather to dovetail seamlessly in a way in which no human piece of writing ever could. This is particularly seen in the four Gospels, and it is this seamlessness and lack of contradiction which led sceptics like Frank Morrison in *Who Moved the Stone?* to become committed believers in the bodily resurrection of Christ. In musical terms, the whole united record reads as a symphony. There is no need to remove one note from it, or a few notes here and there. The overall wonder is lost by doing so, to the point that it is a desecration of the Divine product. If there are passages which we cannot reconcile, the way of humility is surely to accept that we are still waiting for more insight and understanding- rather than arrogantly insisting that Divine inspiration somehow faltered at that point.

And immediately they received their sight and followed him- See on :30 *Followed Him* and :30 *Sitting by the way*. Mk. 10:52 adds that at least one of the blind men "Followed Him *in the way*". But He told the man "Go *your* way" (Mk. 10:52). The man's way was now the Lord's way, the way of the cross. There's surely a play on words here,

for *akoloutheo* translated "followed" means literally 'to be in the same way with'. The Lord told the man to go *his* way, but the man followed Jesus in *His* way, the way which has been defined in :17,18 as the way to the cross. Our way is His way, not in that He dominates and subsumes our individuality beneath His own, but in that we each follow Him in our own particular and unique way. That is not to say that we each have our way in life and that journey must of itself be the right one. It's axiomatic that every man has his own path in life. As believers in Christ, our path must be *following Him*, and not just wandering around in life; but each one in Christ follows their Lord in their own unique path.

CHAPTER 21

21:1 *And when they drew near to Jerusalem*- This suggests that Matthew was not with them at the time. I suggest he was, but in the analogy of the cameraman, he has as it were shifted his camera to Jerusalem and records the group approaching.

And came to Bethphage, to the mount of Olives, then Jesus- 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident later in this section when the Lord curses the fig tree (:19). Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb, 1903, reprint) p. 1132).

Sent two disciples- The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:3), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

21:2 *Saying to them: Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me*- The Greek words translated "tied" and "loose" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier in Matthew, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were

fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, :2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

Mk. 11:4 says that the donkey was tied at a gate, at "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

21:3 *And if anyone says something to you, you shall say: The Lord*- See on 21:1 *Sent two disciples*.

Has need of them- God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be.

And immediately he will send them- "Send" here translates *apostello*, and naturally we think of the apostles, those sent forth with the Gospel. And as so often taught by implication, the Lord is in need of man, the harvest needs workers and without them, in His wisdom, it will not be harvested. We are surely being invited to see these animals as representative of those upon whom the Lord will ride in order to enter Jerusalem in glory. But He rode upon the bucking, difficult colt which had not yet been broken in. This hampered His triumphal entry. And there was the donkey itself with nobody sitting upon it. Just as the Lord consciously tried to fulfil Zech. 9:9 by obtaining these animals, so the hint surely is that His final triumphal entry will be on the basis of us His people carrying Him in.

21:4 *Now this happened so*- The Gospels are highly abbreviated accounts, and yet a significant amount of time is spent explaining how the Lord obtained the donkey and foal. This is to show how consciously He tried to fulfil God's word. He consciously tried to make the word become flesh in Him, as we must (Jn. 1:14).

That it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying- The use of *hina* definitely suggests action *so that* there might be a specific outcome, in this case, the fulfilment of prophecy. This construction is common in the Lord's ministry- something was done *hina*, in order to achieve, the fulfilment of prophecy (Mt. 1:22; 2:15; 4:14; 21:5; 26:56; 27:35; Mk. 14:49; Jn. 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24,36).

21:5 *Tell the daughter of Zion*- A term used in the prophets for the righteous remnant within Jerusalem. The idea was that they would perceive how the Lord was fulfilling the Messianic prophecy of Zech. 9:9. However, the Hebrew text of Zech. 9:9 says that the King comes "having salvation"- but that is omitted in this quotation. The ultimate 'triumphal entry' was yet to come. The Lord entered Jerusalem to obtain salvation through death on the cross, not to bring the immediate salvation from Rome which the people were so fixated upon.

Look, your King comes to you, meek and riding upon an ass and upon a colt the foal of an ass- Kings were supposed to enter their new capital on a charger, a war horse, beaming in proud triumph. The idea of a humble king was an oxymoron to the first century mindset. But the Lord was a King like no other- a humble king, who entered Zion not on a charger but on a donkey with a colt wandering insecurely behind them. Zech. 9:9 goes on to say that by doing this, He will bring deliverance from the war horse / charger: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, *humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*. He will *cut off the chariot* from Ephraim *and the war horse* from Jerusalem; and the *battle bow shall be cut off*, and he shall *command peace* to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth". In this we see the principle of non-

violent victory over violence; the King who comes riding on a donkey will thereby "cut off... the war horse" which was threatening Jerusalem. That war horse was initially a reference to Rome, from whom the Jews thought Messiah would violently deliver them. The Lord went to great efforts to fulfil this prophecy of Zech. 9:9- in order to demonstrate that it was by humility and non-violence that deliverance from violence would finally come. The other accounts say the Lord rode upon the foal of the donkey (e.g. Jn. 12:15). If He sat upon this animal rather than the mother donkey, the Lord was showing how He chose to ride in the 'chariot' rather than on the donkey pulling it. But the donkey and foal were the humblest and weakest imitation possible of a charger and chariot. But this was exactly His point. The glorious victory procession came from Bethphage "and Bethany" (Mk. 11:1), which can mean 'house of the poor'. It was here that the Lord sat upon the humble donkey- again reinforcing the idea that He came as a humble King.
21:6 The record emphasizes the disciples' obedience and solidarity with the Lord, placing their personal clothes as His saddle (:7). It must've all seemed rather bizarre, for they too nursed hopes of an immediate salvation and Kingdom, but they were commendably willing to go along with His insistence of teaching the lesson of 'the humble King'. Jn. 12:16 adds the information that the disciples didn't understand at the time, nor did they see the connection with Zech. 9:9: "These things his disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him". And yet they went along with it all. It is an essay in loyalty and obedience, although not in perception and faith.

21:6 *And the disciples went and did as Jesus directed them*- This is to note their obedience to an otherwise very strange command. They surely secretly hoped that He would achieve a dramatic Messianic salvation. And He was teaching them that that salvation was not now, and He was deconstructing the whole idea of a triumphal entry, as noted on :6. It is to their credit that they humbled themselves beneath this idea.

21:7 *And brought the ass and the colt and put on them their garments; and he sat thereon*- Using their garments as saddles. The fact both animals were saddled was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one

who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

21:8 *Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road*- Paul speaks of how Israel were cut off branches because of their rejection of Jesus (Rom. 11:17,19). The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

Jn. 12:13 says they were palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels,* "The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

21:9 *And the crowds that went before him and that followed shouted: Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!-*
Hosanna means 'Save now'. This obsession with 'Salvation now' was their equivalent of today's prosperity Gospel, which is a similarly false understanding of the Lord.
Matthew records here that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. The accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

"He that comes" was a clearly Messianic title. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was so wrong. They assumed He would bring 'salvation now', and immediate freedom from the Romans and economic hardship.

Hosanna "in the highest" suggests that because the people wanted 'Save *now*' and immediate deliverance from Rome, they assumed that God shared their view. Thus they assumed that their cry of 'Salvation now!' was being uttered in Heaven too. This assumption that God is of course in tune with our wishes is very dangerous- the dashing of this expectation was what unleashed the fury and gross misjudgement in these people which lead to their very soon screaming for the death of God's Son.

The other records add that the Pharisees asked the Lord to restrain His supporters. His response was "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out". There's a strong similarity between the Aramaic and Hebrew words for "sons" and "stones"; and the Lord's 'sons' were the disciples, His spiritual children. It was the disciples who were enthusiastic for His triumphant entry- the crowds soon lost their enthusiasm.

21:10 *And when he had arrived in Jerusalem*- See on :11 *The prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

All the city was stirred, saying- This is the word for a quake or tremor, the

crowd were shocked deeply- by the idea of a humble King.

Who is this?- The Lord was well known in Jerusalem, His miracles and previous visits had hardly gone unnoticed. The question was rather 'What kind of person is this?'. His careful effort to obtain a donkey and colt, and ride the bucking colt in imitation of a charger and chariot... had worked. It had achieved the desired effect of stunning people by the new paradigm of humility which He was exemplifying. The "daughter of Zion" (:5) was singularly unimpressed by the coming of their King. Doubtless there was a connected element of sarcasm in Pilate's question: "Shall I crucify your King?" (Jn. 19:15). And they stated beyond question that they would rather have Caesar as their King than this humble man from Nazareth.

21:11 *And the crowds said: This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee*- I think we can conclude that this answer was not given in proud introduction of their Messiah, but rather agreeing with the sceptical question 'What kind of person is *this*?'. For Nazareth and Galilee were despised and hardly seen as the origin of Messiah nor of any half decent prophet. "Out of Galilee arises no prophet" was the Jewish position (Jn. 7:52). It was to them an oxymoron to say that a prophet, let alone Messiah, could come from there. And Nazareth, with its Gentile connotations and a reputation for siding with the Roman occupants, was likewise despised. Nathanael struggled with the idea that Messiah could come from Nazareth: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46). We can feel the mockery in the recorded words of the girl in the courtyard concerning Peter: "This fellow was also with Jesus *of Nazareth*", and the subsequent comment that Peter shared the Galilean accent of Jesus (Mt. 26:71). This sceptical answer to the Jerusalem crowds was given by the "multitude" that welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem. In the hour or so which His parody of a 'triumphal entry' took, their enthusiasm turned to bitter disillusion. This was not the Messiah they had expected. And their enthusiasm turned to bitter cynicism and disappointment. This is the significance of the information that they said this "When He was entered into Jerusalem" (:10). The crowd greeted Him as their Saviour King, throwing their garments in the street before Him, but as He rode the bucking colt with the dawdling, unenthusiastic donkey before Him, their views changed over that 30 to 60 minutes. Lk. 19:41-44 adds that He burst into tears of desperation and predicted that the enemies of Israel [clearly He had the Romans in view] would soon destroy the city and temple. This was so unpatriotic, and the exact opposite of what the crowds expected from Him: “When he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying: If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not

leave in you one stone upon another. All this will happen because you did not perceive the time of your visitation". The Lord implies that their rejection and destruction was precisely because they turned away from perceiving His entry into the city as their "visitation". They didn't think this was the "time" because they weren't seeing immediate salvation. Or rather, they didn't wish to see it. All they could think was that this was not their man, not at all the Messiah they had expected. Their cry of 'Save now!' ['Hosanna'] produced no dramatic action on His part. He just kept on riding that awkward beast, wandering probably in a zig-zag through the streets.

21:12 *And Jesus entered into the temple of God*- This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

And cast out- A verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (8:12 and soon after this incident, in 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

All them that sold and bought in the temple- This is the context of Zech. 9:8: "And I will encamp for the sake of thine house as a garrison that none pass through or return; and no exactor shall pass through them any more: for now I have seen with mine eyes". This would allude to the Lord's looking around the temple and walking out of it; He banned

carrying things through the temple (Mk. 11:16), and all exaction of money. The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The ban on carrying things through the temple referred to the practice of taking a short cut through the court of the Gentiles rather than having to walk all around the temple complex. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear.

And overthrew- This was not done in simple anger. The Lord's motive was still their reformation. He had entered the temple in allusion to their expectation that Messiah would triumphantly enter Jerusalem and proceed into the temple. They had based that idea upon Malachi 3. But that prophecy continued: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . *and he shall purify the sons of Levi*" (Mal. 3:1,3). This 'cleansing' of the temple was His attempt to purify the sons of Levi. His hopefulness was simply amazing. And it is a strong pattern for we who give up so easily with people.

The tables of the moneychangers and the seats of them that sold the doves- These were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anticlimax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest. Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple, and being acclaimed only by those excluded from Judaism: children, the lame and blind. See on :17 *Went out of the city into Bethany*.

21:13 *And he said to them*- The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these

connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

It is written- The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions (:15). Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

My house- Just as the "feasts *of the Lord*" are described as "feasts *of the Jews*", *God's* house becomes "*your* house" (23:38). They had hijacked God's religion for their own ends, just as so many do today.

Shall be called- Luke uses the present tense, "*is* called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.
Den of thieves- The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfilment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfilment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

A house of prayer; but you make it a den of robbers- This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The

Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

21:14 *And the blind and the lame*- Previously banned from the temple on the basis of 2 Sam. 5:8 LXX. Those rejected from the sacred space now came in to replace those whom the Lord had ejected from it. Clearly His view was that kids and cripples were to replace the pious religious Jews.

Came to Him in the temple and he healed them- The time scale couldn't have been more than a few hours. It presumably took Him some time to eject the Jews from the temple and to stop people carrying burdens through it. The marginalized had heard that the others had been ejected- and came to Him naturally. They would've walked or looked around with glee at the sacred space previously denied to them. Quite why the temple guard didn't arrest the Lord is a significant question. They were surely there, and the Jews would've wanted them to intervene. I suggest the Lord stopped them in their tracks by supernatural power, just as He had earlier been able to walk through the midst of those seeking to kill Him (Jn. 8:59). The Lord demonstrated clearly that He could restrain the power of civil authority, guards and soldiers- if and when He wished. His submission to them in the process of arrest and crucifixion was therefore the more remarkable. It was His submission, not their power. Those same leaders and soldiers would surely have realized that He had the power to restrain them- for He had done so here in the temple, so shortly before His arrest and death. We see here an essay in how the process of His death was a result of His wilfully giving His life; it was not taken from Him, He laid it down (Jn. 10:17,18).

21:15 *But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did and the children that were crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David!*- Presumably they too had been cast out of the temple. This conversation likely took place after the Lord had finished in the temple.

They were moved with indignation, and said to him- Their eye was evil because He was good. The welcoming of the previously marginalized into sacred space produces a similar reaction today. If such categories are allowed to break bread, some get angry to the point of white hot hatred, which in God's eyes is murder. Their eye became evil because He was good. The same Greek word for "displeased" is used regarding how the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because the Lord had healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:14).

21:16 *Do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said to them: Yes. Did you never read*- He was speaking to the educated who could read. "Never read" would've jarred with them- they spent their lives poring over the Scriptures. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise?- A strange grammatical construction, the plural "babes" have a singular "mouth", so united are they in devotion to the Lord. Hence we find that the word translated "perfected" is elsewhere rendered "perfectly joined together". The quotation from Ps. 8:2 is from a Psalm often alluded to in the New Testament. It was first written as David reflected upon his victory over Goliath, an incident clearly typical of the Lord's victory on the cross. The young people rejoiced in David's victory and joined Him in triumphing over his enemies in praise to God for the victory. This indicates that the Lord considered His victory as in a sense already accomplished; He saw those youngsters' praise of Him and acceptance of their place in God's house as being effectively their praise for His victory over the Goliath of sin. The quotation also associates the angry, intellectually defeated Jewish leaders with the Philistines- another one in a series of suggestions that they are effectively Gentiles and no longer God's people (see on :13). Let's pause to give all this teaching its due weight- that legalism and exclusiveness are no better than Baal worship, and such orthodoxy is only a faithfulness to human tradition rather than to God.

21:17 *And he left them and went out of the city*- His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it.

To Bethany and lodged there- This continues the radical subversion of Jewish Messianic expectations. They had expected a glorious entry into Jerusalem by Messiah, and His entering the temple in order to fulfil the hopes of Ezekiel's temple visions- that Messiah in glory would enter the temple. Instead, the Lord enters Jerusalem on a rider-less donkey, Himself sitting awkwardly on a wayward foal, enters the temple and castigates the Jews, throwing them out of it. And now He leaves the city and goes to Bethany, "the house of the poor". Rather like a pretender to the Presidency mounting a not very serious coup attempt, and going to spend the night in a low cost housing area, perhaps in an apartment in a run down tenement block known as 'the house of the poor'. Or perhaps a night shelter would be the most dynamic equivalent. That is not to say that the home in Bethany was actually poor, my comment is on the meaning of 'Bethany' as 'house of the poor'. The use of *eis*, "into", rather than a word carrying the sense of *unto*, serves to heighten the sense of

anti-climax. He ended this parody of a triumphal entry by entering into 'the house of the poor'.

The Lord being the psychologist *extraordinaire* that He was, it could almost seem that He was engineering a situation which would turn public opinion against Him and lead to His betrayal to the Romans. And yet on the other hand, He had made all these points multiple times in His teaching, beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. He had explained as clearly as could be that His Kingdom was not at that time a political one, rather was it about service of others and internal transformation. He had so often elevated humility above anything else. But all His teaching had been skim listened to; people had taken what they wanted from Him, and decided that He was who they wanted and needed Him to be, rather than who He said He was. And so through this parody of a triumphal entry, He was visually and very publicly explaining what He really stood for. And thereby very powerfully exposing their hopes as mere selfishness, their ideals as misplaced, their understandings as faulty. I wouldn't say that He did this with the express intention of bringing about His death, but rather motivated by the hope that His one last appeal might still trigger response amongst the true "daughter of Zion". His predictions of His death, however, indicate that He knew what would happen. A psychologist weighing up the situation as it stood at the triumphant entry, even if he didn't know how the story would end, would likely be able to predict accurately what would've happened. The Jews would become deeply angry with Jesus, their hopes in Him would have turned to hatred and anger, they would desire to kill Him, and being unable to legally do so, would hand Him over to the Romans to execute. Indeed, Judas had already trodden this road one step ahead of the masses.

21:18 *Now in the morning as he returned to the city*- A hint that His final return in the morning of Zion's new day will require at least some fruit on the fig tree, the beginnings of repentance and spiritual fruit in Israel.

He became hungry- Hungry in the morning, having spent the night at Mary and Martha's home? Had Martha failed in providing food for some reason? More likely the Lord had been fasting for Israel's repentance. And His hunger spoke of His desire to see even the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. His fast was for fruit on Israel; if He had found it, He would have eaten it and thus broken His fast.

21:19 *And seeing a fig tree by the roadside, he went to it and*- Symbolic of Israel (Jer. 24:1-8; Hos. 9:10,16; Is. 28:4 RV; 34:2,4,8; Rev. 6:13; Lk. 13:6-9; 17:6; 19:6; Mic. 7:1 RV). Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside, whose fruit should have been for all that passed by

(Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord.

Found nothing thereon- His disappointment was great because of His earlier parable about Himself and the fig tree, in which He had put these words in His own mouth: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, after that thou shalt cut it down". He looked over and around the tree, desperate to see at least some signs of fruit. He realized that the tree of Israel had to be cut down.

But leaves only- The inadequate covering for sin with which human history began in Eden.

And he said to it: Let there be no fruit from you- If the fruit on the fig tree represents spiritual fruit, does this suggest that now the possibility of repentance was taken away from them? It was as if judgment day had really arrived for them even in this life; for there will be no possibility of repentance then. Or it could be that the Lord was annulling the prophecies about *Israel* filling the face of the earth with fruit. His emphasis then would have been on "May no fruit grow *on you*". The tree of Israel was to be cut down, and the fruit was to come from the fig tree "and all the trees" of the Gentile nations. This is the connection with the Lord's later sign of the fig tree and all the trees (Lk. 21:29); when spiritual fruit is seen on all of them, when the Gospel has gone into all the world, to all the trees / nations, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14).

Again- AV "For ever", for the *aion*, the age. He could mean throughout the new age which was to start, for Israel are prophesied as finally blossoming and filling the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). Or it could be that that prophecy about Israel was conditional, and the Lord is accepting that their rejection of Him meant that it and other such prophecies were now disallowed from fulfilment in themselves by what they were going to do to Him.

And immediately the fig tree withered away- "From the roots", Mark adds. This meant the ground was cursed- the land of Israel. And the roots may refer to the ending of the Mosaic law. "Ephraim ['fruitful'] is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit... My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:10,16,17).

21:20 *And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying*- Their amazement is presented in Mk. 11:21,22 as a lack of faith, calling forth from the Lord the rebuke: "Have faith in God". After all the miracles they had seen, it's pathetic that they doubted as to the Lord's ability to dry up a fig tree. Yet again, the initial Gospel writers and preachers draw

attention to their own weakness of faith. Seeing that the fig tree was such a well known symbol of Israel (see on :19), the disciples may have perceived the incident as an acted parable. Their comment "How soon is the fig tree withered" (Mk.) could be seen as a criticism of how quickly the Lord had withered it. But this would in turn indicate that they had totally failed to understand His earlier teaching of how He had asked the Father for more time for Israel than He had intended to give it, and had personally done the servile work of digging and dunging it in the hope that fruit would come. Their struggle to believe what the Lord had done reflected the wider struggle they and we have to accept that humility, the humble entry rather than the triumphal one, is the way of God. They struggled to believe that the entire system of formal religious worship was being done away and replaced by kids and cripples, literally and spiritually, in the sacred space. The Lord's subsequent exhortations to faith must be seen in this context- the faith to believe this. I recall a brother once at the heart of a community of believers being disfellowshipped over a false accusation. I urged him to break bread alone. He told me that he didn't have the faith... to sit and break bread alone, with no hymns, no president, no surrounding church. We sat in a fast food joint in a London suburb and I had to lead him in the breaking of bread service- he was so used to standing there on Sunday mornings, either presiding or giving the lesson... He has often recalled that there in McDonalds, he found his faith. Faith in God and Jesus, and not in any organization or human church.

How did the fig tree immediately wither away?- The Lord had said that it would happen immediately (:19). According to the other records, the disciples made this comment the next day. They somehow doubted the Lord could work with such immediate effect. And this strange lack of faith was surely because they perceived that the fig tree represented Israel and all they had once held dear in their culture. The disciples asked how the fig tree [cp. Israel] withered away so quickly. The answer, of course, was in that Jesus had faith that it would. He goes on to tell them that if *they* had faith, the mountain of Zion, the hope of Israel, would be cast into the sea of nations (:20,21). The Lord Jesus is surely saying that *His* faith should not be seen as separate from *our* faith. According to the faith of the disciples, the Hope of Israel, rejected by the withered fig tree of Israel, could be spread to the Gentiles. But the spread of the Gospel world-wide was and is conditional upon our faith, modelled as it must be upon His example.

21:21 *And Jesus answered and said to them: Truly I say to you, If you have faith*- See on :20. The faith in view was faith in the Lord's new way of doing things, a religion of kids and cripples outside of organized religion.

And doubt not- The 'faith' was faith in the passing of the Jewish system.

"Doubt not" translates *diakrino* which can better be translated to make a difference, to discriminate. It was as if the Lord was saying: 'I know you believe. But to believe in *this* will be hard. Don't make a difference, believing in some things and not others. Believe in this too'.

You shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if you shall say to- They too were to play a part in the withering of the fig tree- by preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.

This mountain- There is a clear semantic connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the moving of the mountain into the sea. The mountain in view was the temple mount. The Lord is comforting them that not only would the tree of Israel be withered, but the whole mount Zion, the most sacred space in Judaism, would be cast to the Gentiles [the "sea"]. This kind of thing was what His parody of a triumphal entry had been all about, and His casting out of the religious Jews from the temple and replacing them with kids and cripples, those formerly excluded from the sacred space. The faith to move the temple mount to the Gentiles was the very faith which Peter was later required to have in preaching to the Gentiles represented by Cornelius. The Lord recognized that this paradigm shift was a matter of faith, and He urged the disciples to realize their psychological problem and accept it needed special help from God to get over. This incident obviously had huge relevance for the first century communities of believers who were baptized as a result of Matthew's Gospel; for acceptance of the end of the Jewish system and the acceptance of the Gentiles was the live issue for the early churches. Mk. 11:25 adds: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses". The motivation in accepting others into fellowship, in accepting the casting of the sacred space of Mount Zion to the Gentiles, was to be from realizing their own urgent need for forgiveness and their moral frailty. Those faced with similar struggles about accepting others, or allowing previously rejected categories into Christian fellowship, need to take this advice.

Be taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done- To be removed and cast into the sea was a word picture of condemnation. And yet *airo*, to remove or take away, surely reflects the Hebraism of 'taking away' with reference to taking away sin (s.w. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:5 "takes away the sin of the [Jewish] world"). This was a phrase with two possible meanings. The disciples could achieve this in that their preaching would give mount Zion both the possibility of sin being taken away [if they responded] and of condemnation, being cast into the sea like Gentile Babylon [if they rejected their message]. The same words and ideas are found in Rev. 18:21, where Babylon is 'taken up' [s.w. "removed"] and cast into the sea. However, the Lord soon uses the same word in telling the Jews that the Kingdom was to be "taken from you and given to a nation bringing

forth the fruits [of the Kingdom]" (:43). This reference to fruit connects with the Lord's teaching about the fig tree which was cursed for not bearing fruit. The rejected servant was likewise to be 'taken away' in condemnation (22:13), just as the flood "took them all away" (24:39), the talent was 'taken away' from the rejected (25:28,29). Significantly, the Lord had used this same word for 'remove' or 'take away' in the first cleansing of the temple, when He commanded the traders to "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16); and likewise it is used about the 'taking away' of the branches of the tree of Israel (Jn. 15:2). The Lord is telling the disciples that they too will be able to make such a removing of the unclean from the system of Judaism, and likewise cause the withering of Israel's tree. In fact it was the Romans who "took away our place and nation" (Jn. 11:48 s.w.) but this was on account of Israel's rejection of the disciples' preaching. In that sense, therefore, it was they who had caused the temple Mount to be taken away and cast into the sea of Gentiles. This too is the power of our preaching. We are not merely discharging a responsibility to evangelize so that we feel better, let alone doing a PR exercise for our local church or denomination. Our presentation of the message to others has eternal consequence for them- to their salvation or condemnation. Significantly, the same word is used for how on the cross, the Lord 'took away' the Mosaic Law (Col. 2:14).

"Cast into the sea" were the very words used by the Lord in describing the fate of the Jews who made the little ones stumble (Mk. 9:42). The little ones had been brought into the temple to replace the Jewish religious leaders. Those leaders had previously refused to accept those little ones. Their judgment was to be cast into the sea as Babylon (Rev. 18:21 same words). But this would only happen once the disciples had preached to them after the resurrection- they were given chance after chance, despite the Lord's cursing of the fig tree with immediate effect.

Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.

21:22 *And all things, whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive*- This evidently has some context and limitations, because there is no reason to think that we literally receive whatever we ask. Even the Lord didn't. The context is the ability to change, the ability to accept paradigm shifts, to have the courage to preach; the mindset which can cope with a previous worldview coming to an end. This is exactly why people are so unwilling to change cherished beliefs and practices- because their conservatism is more powerful in their own minds than God's word. We need to accept we have this problem, and rejoice that whatever we ask for in this psychological and at times practical battle will indeed be granted to us.

21:23 *And when he had entered into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said*- "Entered" is *erchomai* , and is matched by the priests and elders 'coming' to Him, *proserchomai*. The impression is created of direct confrontation, head on.

By what authority do you do these things?- Presumably they thought they had Him caught out, because *exousia* was supposedly solely with Rome. He could hardly say the Romans had given Him such authority. And yet if He said anything other than 'Rome', then He could be reported to the Roman authorities. However, their reference may have been to what we noted at 21:14- the Lord had held back the temple guard from arresting Him and stopping His forceful overthrowing of the temple traders. This question was quite to be expected of a man who had recently used violence to overthrow tables and force men off the premises. Who had given Him such authority?

And who gave You this authority?- To this day this question is heard. People, especially religious people, find it so hard to accept that somebody can have a personal relationship with God which enables and empowers them to operate as sovereign free agents amongst mere men. This cry is especially heard from those who themselves think they have authority and seek to hold on to their petty power at all costs. It is the typical cry when someone obeys their Lord's command to baptize people, takes the initiative to extend fellowship to another etc.

21:24 *And Jesus answered and said to them: I also will ask you one question, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things*- It is not necessarily wrong to avoid answering a question- although few of us could do so in the spiritually and logically flawless way the Lord did here, let alone at a moment's notice.

The AV is mistaken in translating "If you tell me, I will tell you". The sense rather is: 'If you answer this question, then in that answer you will have My telling you the answer to your question'. They finally answered in :27 that 'We cannot know' (AV again is unhelpful by offering here "We cannot tell"- the Greek words for AV "tell" are all different in this section).

21:25 *The baptism of John*- Perhaps John's message was so centred around the appeal for baptism that "the baptism of John" is being put for 'the teaching and ministry of John'. Or maybe the Lord has in view His own baptism by John. In this case, His reasoning would be that His authority came from the fact that He had been baptized by John. Seeing John's work was from God and had Divine authority, this meant therefore that the Lord was empowered by that baptism to operate with God's authority. If that is indeed what the Lord intended, then we have another

window onto the perplexing question of why the Lord was baptized by John.

Where was it from? From heaven or from men?- Gamaliel uses the same logic in Acts 5:38,39 in urging the Jews to boil all the personal feelings and doubts down to a simple issue: Are these men and their work of God or man? This approach is helpful to us too, assailed as we are by unclarity about others. Is a man in Christ or not? Does God work through him or not? Is he of God or men? There is no middle ground here. This is what I submit concerning myself to those who doubt me, and it is the approach I seek to take with others with whom I have to engage in spiritual life. And Gamaliel rightly concluded that if something is of man and not of God, then we have little to worry about. Finally it will come to nothing. We should be concerned rather with the eternal consequence of refusing those who are clearly of God. If of God, we must accept them.

And they discussed it among themselves, saying: If we shall say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him?- This could imply they withdrew for discussion amongst themselves. But such a withdrawal would've been a sign of weakness. More likely we have here an insight into their own internal reasonings. In this case, the statement in :27 that "They answered... and said, We cannot tell" was uttered by each of them in turn as the Lord asked them individually.

21:26 *But if we shall say, from men, we fear the crowd-* They all considered John as a prophet, whereas the chief priests and elders did not. We see here a marked difference between the people and their religious leaders. Indeed, the leaders despised the common people: "This people who know not the Law are cursed" (Jn. 7:49). And yet very soon now, the leaders would be apparently controlling the people to cry for the blood of Jesus. But this chapter so far has shown that this was not really the reason why the masses turned against Jesus. They turned against Him because of His dashing of their hopes and refusal to pander to their expectations, exemplified by His wilful parody of a triumphal entry into the city and temple. The huge gap between the elders and the masses was so great that it cannot be credible that the elders managed to manipulate them so quickly to turn 180 degrees and to reject the Jesus whom their hero John had insisted was the Messiah.

For all hold John as a prophet- And yet the Lord had said that “the men of this generation” held John to be demon possessed, i.e. crazy (Lk. 7:33). We can on one hand feel and state respect for someone, whilst in reality not accepting them as any authority at all, and effectively considering them as if they are mad, not to be taken seriously.

21:27 *And they answered Jesus and said: We do not know-* See on :25 *They reasoned with themselves* and :24 *If you answer Me.* The Greek

means 'We cannot *know*'. They had set themselves up as defenders of the Faith, whose duty it was to analyse the claims of teachers and decide whether or not they were false prophets. But now they are beaten in fair intellectual fight. They can give no answer, and yet by saying they could not judge John's claim to be a prophet, they were abdicating the very role of assessors of teachers which they claimed to have, and which they were using against the Lord.

He replied to them: Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things- He meant that they knew in their consciences and did not need Him to spell it out to them in words. This was again His style in His silence before His judges, and in His brief answer to Pilate: "You are saying it" (Lk. 23:3). The answer was in Pilate's own words rather than the Lord's.

21:28 *But what do you think? A man*- God.

Had two sons, and he came to the first, and said- In the form of John, who "came unto you" (:32- a related word is used for "come"). God was manifest in the preaching of John, just as He personally comes to men through our preaching. This accounts for the special sense of Divine presence which we have in our efforts to preach His Son and appeal to men. Paul can speak of how God Himself appeals to people through us (2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1).

Son- These people were already in the family of God. They represent those to whom John the Baptist came (:32).

Today- The suggestion is that there is urgent work to do, presumably harvest was ripe and what was not gathered today would be lost. The refusal to work was therefore rooted in a refusal to appreciate the significance of their work. Without it, harvest would be lost, and they would all be the poorer.

Go and work- The Lord's interpretation is that the "work" required was belief and repentance (:32). The work of God is indeed to *believe* in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:29). This definition of 'works' was so different to that held by Judaism, according to which 'works' were physical acts of obedience to specific legal regulations. And yet clearly the Christian call is to action, to "works", without which any profession of faith is "dead". We are to "go trade" [s.w. "go work"] with the talents given us, and the man who does not so work with them will be condemned (Mt. 25:16). Paul's apparent deprecation of "works" in Romans (Rom. 4:4,5; 6:23) is surely to be understood with reference to "the works of the Law" of Moses (Rom. 3:27; 9:32; Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5,10), i.e. works done in obedience to that legislation in the hope of salvation upon that basis. The call is to work in response to the call. Not simply assent to theology, the specific doctrines of a Christian denomination, join a Christian social club; but work, labour, toil for Him in His service.

In the vineyard- The vineyard must refer to the means of bringing forth spiritual fruit, according to the Lord's use of the vine figure in Jn.15. Being in the vineyard is therefore all about bringing forth the fruits of spirituality, showing forth the moral likeness of God. This is the intended "work" we are asked to do. And yet the idea of being called by God to work in His vineyard [Israel] was language used in Judaism for the call of the priestly class to do the work of religious specialists amongst the nation of Israel, God's vineyard. But the parable teaches that this is God's invitation to everyone in the new system of things which He is developing.

21:29 *And he answered and said: I will not*- Not so much a bald refusal as 'I don't wish to, I don't have the desire to'.

But afterward he repented and went- This Greek word for "afterward" is used three times in Matthew 21 (and only 9 times elsewhere in the NT). The Jews are criticized for not repenting "after" they had seen the whores repent at John's teaching (21:32); and "afterward" (AV "last of all"), after sending the prophets of which John was the last, God sent His Son to appeal to Israel (21:37). The son who initially refused to work therefore speaks of those in Israel who refused to hear the prophets and John, and yet "after" all that appeal, responded to the Lord Jesus.

"Afterward he repented" is exactly the same words in :32. Afterwards- after the Lord's ministry- they did *not* repent. The Jews who initially responded to John are therefore are the son who said he would work but never did. The same Greek word for "afterward" is also found in :37: "Last of all [s.w. "afterward"] He sent unto them His Son". The Lord's coming was intended to bring the disobedient son to repentance- and to go work in the vineyard.

He went- to work in the vineyard. The motivation of the man to labour was because he had repented and been forgiven. His motive was not simply obedience out of respect to his Father, but rather now was it gratitude for forgiveness.

21:30 *And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said: I go sir*- Literally, "I, Sir!". The suggestion is that he was presenting himself as more obedient and respectful than his brother. And yet as so often, those who consider themselves the longer and harder workers in the vineyard, feeling superior to their weaker brothers, are in fact less than them in practice. Surely the Lord had in mind Ex. 24:7: "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient".

But did not go- In the parable of the two sons, the Lord divides us into two groups- those who respond to a calling to 'go' by saying they will, but don't go; and those who refuse to go but afterwards go. This is clearly an allusion to Jonah. But Jonah is thus made typical of each and every one of us.

21:31 *Which of the two did the will of his father? They replied: The first. Jesus said to them: Truly I say to you*- The contrast is between doing the will of God, and simply saying in words that we will. This is the very tension which the Lord illustrates in the parable of the houses built on sand and rock. The same words for 'doing the will of the Father' are found in 7:21: "Not every one that says unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that *does the will of My Father*". Israel's response to John had been a saying of "Lord, Lord" to Jesus, a prompt response to the request to work in the vineyard- but they never went further. They did not actually repent, even though John's message had been a call to repentance. Repentance can be easily 'made' in words, but this is merely surface level. We need to examine our own repentance in the light of this caveat. Surely the Lord had this same category in view when He spoke of how "many stripes" await the one who knows his Lord's will, but doesn't do it (Lk. 12:47 s.w.). As ever, the Lord had Himself in mind as He spoke such demanding words. He was the Son of the Father who "did the will" and finished His "work"; who said yes straight away, and fulfilled it (Jn. 4:34; 6:38; Heb. 10:7,9 s.w.). In all our teaching of others we must likewise never take our eyes off our own position before God.

That the tax collectors and the prostitutes- Matthew, the speaker and author of this Gospel, had been one of them, a tax collector. His appeal for others to respond to the call was therefore interlaced with his own recognition and proclamation that he was in the category of those who had initially said 'No', but afterwards repented. Doubtless the Lord was aware that His followers included tax collectors and prostitutes and He was seeking to justify them.

Go into the Kingdom of God before you- To 'go before', *proago*, means just that. The word has just been used of how the crowd 'went before' Him in His [parody of a] triumphant entry into Jerusalem (:9). It doesn't necessarily mean that they would enter the Kingdom, for as mentioned above, the Lord's teaching was that those who did not do the will of God would not enter the Kingdom at all. The idea is rather that the harlots and tax collectors would go into the Kingdom as their heralds, suggesting that their judgment at the time of the Kingdom would be on the basis that the serious sinners had repented and entered the Kingdom, but they had not. And that fact would be waiting for them as they arrived for judgment at the gates of the Kingdom. Paul may be alluding to this when he says that the sins of some men 'go before' them to judgment (1 Tim. 5:24 s.w.). Or it could be that even at this dire moment, the Lord still entertained the hope that His persecutors and enemies would enter the Kingdom finally, even if the whores would have a better place in the Kingdom than them.

21:32 *For John came to you*- His coming to the people was as it were God's coming to them (:28,30). God was manifest in him, as He is in all

preachers. We are His voice and appeal to men.

In the way of righteousness- The very phrase used in 2 Pet. 2:21 about the Christian Gospel. John's work had been to prepare the Lord's "way" (3:3; 11:10), over which Messiah could have come in glory to Zion, in fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies about this. The Lord is referencing the idea that if Israel had responded to John, then the triumphant entry into Zion which He had just parodied earlier in this chapter could really have been achieved.

And you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him- This was clearly intended to address the inner thought of the audience, that "If we shall say, from heaven, he will say to us, why then did you not believe him?" (21:25). The Lord knew their thoughts- clearly, in this instance at least, not so much as from direct Divine revelation, but from His sensitivity to them and reading of their minds.

John the Baptist was a popular preacher. All Jerusalem went out to hear him. Even the hardline Orthodox were baptized by him. People liked his hard line austerity, his criticism of them. They lined up to hear it, and to confess their sins to him. But Jesus interpreted it differently. He said John's ministry was like children wanting to play at funerals with some other children- so they started weeping, but the others still wouldn't respond. Jesus came, piping; He wanted them to play weddings. But still they didn't respond in true repentance (Lk. 7:32-35). The Lord judged that Israel didn't respond to John; indeed, *if* they had truly received him, he would have been the Elijah prophet for them (Mt. 11:14 RVmg.). What this teaches is that believers can respond to a tough line, to the ra-ra of an uncompromising moralizing message; and yet not *really* repent nor accept the Lordship of Jesus in their hearts. Mt. 21:32 states clearly that the Jews generally didn't believe John the Baptist, nor repent. And yet they flocked to him in apparent repentance and were baptized. As we all know, repentance is one of the hardest things to be thoroughly genuine about.

And afterwards when you saw it- The second son who had said 'Yes' but not gone to work needed to become as the first son; realizing he was no better than the first son, and likewise repenting and going to work whilst there was still time, to achieve at least something in the Father's vineyard. But it was a bridge too far for the Jewish leadership and Israel in general to make this connection- that they had to shift from their self-righteousness into the position of the whores and tax collectors.

The good example of others contributes to our experience of the upward spiral. And yet if we don't respond to them, we can be held accountable for it and slip into the downward spiral. Thus the Lord held the elders of Israel guilty because when they saw the whores and tax collectors repenting at John's preaching, "you, when you had seen it, repented not".

They should have been influenced by the repentance of those people; they should've allowed repentance to be contagious. But they didn't, and so they were held guilty for that. The Lord is telling the Jews that they were even more culpable for not repenting at the preaching of John the Baptist because the publicans and sinners had done so; and they hadn't. They should've changed their minds ['repented'] after they saw the publicans and sinners repent- so the Lord incisively observed and judged. The implication of that seems to me to be that we are intended to be inspired to faith and repentance by that of others. This is why the Christian life is intended to be lived in community.

You still did not repent- Mt. 21:29,32 parallel 'repent and work' with 'repent and believe'. As the Lord said in Jn. 6:29, the work of God is to believe- in the forgiveness of sins. The experience of repentance and forgiveness will result in an ever deeper faith, and the works of gratitude which are inseparable part of faith. The parable speaks of repenting and going to work in the Father's vineyard; as if care for our brethren, seeking their fruitfulness and that of this world [after the pattern of the vineyard of Isaiah 5] is the obvious work of repentance. The Lord castigated the audiences of John the Baptist that they did not "repent, that ye might believe". Repentance would lead to faith… and yet it is faith which leads to repentance. The two things work together to form an upward spiral of growth.

And believe him- Their repentance and acceptance of the forgiveness of sins which John spoke of necessitated their belief in Christ as the lamb of God, the sacrifice for sin, of whom John also spoke. The repentance he urged them to make suggests that forgiveness was available- but his message was that that forgiveness was possible ultimately through the work of Jesus as the lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). Paul explained this in so many words: "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him" (Acts 19:4).

AV "Repented not so that you might believe him" translates an awkward phrase in the Greek, and the translations which suggest 'You didn't repent and believe him' are being too simplistic. There is definitely a causative sense implied- they did not repent *so that* they believed him. To repent, to change their minds as required by John, involved believing his message, which was about Jesus as the lamb of God who took away sin and thereby gave meaning and possibility to their repentance. Here, the Lord connects repentance with belief; yet we read that in practice, people believe and are baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sin. So belief and repentance are connected. The belief in John that is spoken of here was effectively a belief in Jesus: "John truly baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe in Him [Jesus] who should come after him" (Acts 19:4). If we repent, change our

minds and decide to respond, then immediately the issue of forgiveness is thrown up. Have I now been forgiven? Can I be? How? And this is what leads seamlessly into faith in Christ as the lamb of God to take away our sin.

21:33 *Hear another parable*- The Lord's hopefulness at their response is remarkable; He makes a continued appeal to those who in other teaching He has stated have gone too far and are even now condemned. His hopefulness for human response is outstanding and a huge encouragement for us.

There are strong similarities between the Lord's parable and the song of the vineyard of Isaiah 5:1-7, especially in the LXX:
"*Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard* [The genre is significant; what begins as a joyful, idyllic harvest song turns into bitter disappointment and declaration of judgment]. *My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill* [The environment was ideal]. *He dug it up* [to dig was the work of the lowest servant, but God did this], *gathered out its stones* [the effects of the curse were ameliorated], *planted it with the choicest vine* ["the men of Judah"], *built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?* [Absolutely all has been done to enable our fruitfulness. The Father wants fruit above all- in the Mt. 21 parable, the owner seeks the actual fruit, rather than cash payment. This element of unreality serves to show His passionate interest in fruit] *Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down* [The downtreading of the temple at the hands of the Gentiles]. *I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briers and thorns* [The language of the curse in Eden. The land was as the Garden of Eden, but Israel sinned "as Adam"]. *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it* [the language of Elijah, prototype of John the Baptist]. *For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness* [the fruit required was justice and righteousness- instead, as Isaiah 5 goes on to explain, there was materialistic selfishness], *but, behold, a cry of distress*".

There was a man that was master of a house- Literally, the head of the family. Clearly in this parable it refers to God, but the Lord used exactly this term to refer to Himself specifically (10:25; 20:1,11; Lk. 13:25). It is far too simplistic to conclude 'Therefore Jesus is God'. There is too strong a weight of Biblical evidence against that position. The titles and functions

of the Father are clearly applicable to the Son- and in fact the same Greek word is used about us as believers "in Christ" (13:52; 24:43).

Who planted a vineyard- The language of planting a vineyard and eating the fruit of it is used in 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:7 about *our* work of preaching. Paul was unafraid to interpret the parable on multiple levels. We are to be fruitful; but in our work of sharing the Gospel with others we are also the planters who come seeking fruit on our converts. The suggestion could be that the owner personally did the planting and preparing. I say this because Isaiah 5, upon which the parable is based, includes this feature- of the owner doing so much personally. See on :34 *The winepress*. All has been done so that we can produce spiritual fruit; but so often we excuse our lack of fruitfulness by blaming environment factors. The situation in our country, our town, workplace, marriage, family, health etc. And we can put huge effort into trying to change environment because we consider that we can be more fruitful for God in a different environment. But whilst passivity and fatalism are just as wrong, it must be accepted that our environment in the bigger picture has been uniquely and thoughtfully prepared by God so that we might be fruitful. For it is clear from the parable that our fruitfulness is God’s most passionate desire and intention for us. He would hardly place us in any other environment, therefore, than one ideally prepared by Him in order to enable and enhance our fruitfulness.

And set a hedge about it- The same word is used for the Law of Moses as the "wall of partition" (Eph. 2:14). Although the vineyard was to be given to others, it was itself destroyed and dismantled by the owner; which involved the taking away of the Law of Moses. The vineyard functioned differently, on the basis of fruit being produced in the vine of Christ (Jn. 15).

And dug a winepress- This was the place where the grapes were trodden to produce wine. It features in all record of this parable. What does it represent? Perhaps the temple, designed to be the means of producing the wine of covenant relationship with God. The targums on Isaiah 5, the song of the vineyard upon which the parable is based, interpret it as a reference to the destruction of the temple. But the Lord only elsewhere uses the term when three times using it as a symbol of God's final judgment of condemnation (Rev. 14:19,20; 19:15). This is typical of the structure of God's plans with men. What is designed for our blessing can also be for our condemnation, just as a cup of wine is used as a symbol of both blessing and condemnation. Time and again we are left with nothing but two choices before us- of acceptance or condemnation. Israel were the vine of God's planting which produced bad fruit (Jer. 2:21; Dt. 32:32,33; Hos. 10:1). The lack of good grapes on the vine was because of Israel's unspirituality (Jer. 8:13) and allowing the wonderful vineyard

to become overgrown (Jer. 5:17). The reason why the workers beat and killed the servants was surely because actually they had no fruit to give them, even though the environment was perfect for good wine. The land of Israel was an environment and climate ideally suited to producing good vines (Dt. 8:7). There was supposed to be joy at the gathering of the vine harvest- and that connection is frequently made in the Old Testament. Indeed, the pictures of joy and wine at harvest are the pictures of the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come- but Israel didn't produce the good grapes. Likewise, believe it or not, God has created an ideal environment for each of us to produce spiritual fruit. The song of the Vineyard in Is. 5:1-7 is clearly the basis of the Lord's parable here, and this is the thrust of that story- that all had been done by God for the viticulture to flourish, but it didn't because of Israel's refusal to respond and to work. Isaiah 5 goes on to condemn Israel for drunkenness (Is. 5:11-13,22), as if they had used the vine for their own selfishness, rather like the Jews had made the "feasts of Yahweh" the "feast of the Jews", His house had become "your house", and just as we can use the structure of God's working with men, the body of Christ, the mystical temple, as a social club for our own pleasure. God therefore withheld rain so that in any case, fruit was now impossible for Israel (Is. 5:6); and that is exactly the Lord's message in Mt. 21. The Isaiah 5 passage is in turn developed in Is. 27:2-6, where we find that Yahweh Himself guarded the vineyard, watered and weeded it, such was His almost obsessive interest in this project (Is. 27:3). The fruit hoped for was righteousness and justice (Is. 5:7); human injustice usually arises from passivity, going along with a group situation which hurts individuals and denies them justice. And this was the lack of fruit which led to condemnation. Is. 5:5 and Ps. 80:13 say that the judgment of the vineyard is in terms of having its walls broken down and it being destroyed; the Lord's parable doesn't deny that, but doesn't specifically mention it- rather does He focus upon fruit being produced by different workers. Jn. 15 uses the imagery of the vine to suggest that fruit now comes from being branches within the vine of Christ- which grows with no reference to any vineyard, freestanding in the world.

And built a tower- It may be that the emphasis upon the tower and winepress is simply to show the degree of effort God went to so that the vineyard could produce fruit. The details of the allegory fall away compared to the supreme point- that God did all possible to provide an environment which would produce fruit.

And let it out to husbandmen; and went into another country- Not necessarily the ascension of the Lord Jesus. It could be a reference to God’s entry of covenant with Israel, at which "God came down on mount Sinai" (Ex. 19:20; 20:19) and then "ascended up on high" (Ps. 68:18). The Greek specifically means to go into a foreign, i.e. Gentile,

country. It is used of the prodigal son going into a far country (Lk. 15:13). Let us remember that the Son in the parable represents the Lord Jesus, the owner is clearly God. This going away is not therefore representative of the Lord's ascension to Heaven, although it appears to be used that way in 25:14,15; Mk. 13:34 ["the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey", s.w.]. This may just be the furniture of the parable, alluding to the common experience of absentee landlords. These were often characterized by being uncaring for their land; but this owner was particular careful for his project to the point of obsession. He wanted the fruit, not money. It therefore may be part of the impression given, that the owner appears to be absent and disinterested- but in reality He is passionately interested. And this is exactly the position with God, who is perceived as somehow distant and passionless about His project on earth. There may also be the hint that even before He considered giving His precious vineyard to the Gentiles, which appears at the end of the parable, He had in fact initially envisaged this, and had in some form gone to the Gentiles right from the start of His project with Israel.

Initially, the parable would've got the hearers on the side of the labourers; because it was a frequent complaint that absentee landlords abused their tenants, who worked hard just to send cash off to the landlord in another country. But the parable twists around, so that after initially identifying with this group, the people came to see that it was they who stood condemned.

21:34 *And when the harvest season drew near*- A phrase used by Matthew about the drawing near of the Kingdom at Christ's time (3:2; 4:17). But by the end of His ministry, the Lord was warning that false teachers would wrongly claim that "the time draws near" (Lk. 21:8). Clearly He taught that the time had drawn near, but not come. He taught at the end of His ministry how He was as a man who had gone to a far country for a long time. This invites us to understand that with each appeal of the prophets, and of John as the last prophet, the time potentially could have come. God's purpose is thus open ended. Peter uses the same word to speak of how the end of all things is drawing near (1 Pet. 4:7), and Paul likewise (Rom. 13:12). It could have come in AD70- but again, a great delay, until our last days. This is why setting any date for the second coming is inappropriate- for it is a case of fulfilling preconditions, rather than awaiting a day fixed on a calendar. "The season" for fruit (Mk. 12:2) had indeed come, many times- all was potentially ready for it, but human failure meant there was no harvest.

He sent- The Greek *apostello* again encourages the apostles to see themselves as the equivalent of the Old Testament 'sent ones'- the prophets.

His servants to the husbandmen, to get his fruit- The prophets (2 Kings

9:7 and often). Note that the prophets were sent from God, as the Lord Jesus was; but this doesn't imply they were in Heaven with God before their sending, and neither was the Lord.

21:35 *And the husbandmen took his servants and beat one*- When the world reviled him, Paul saw himself as the beaten prophets Jesus had spoken about (2 Cor. 11:24,25 = Mt. 21:35). Mk. 12:4 adds that the last servant was "wounded in the head", surely a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist and shameful treatment of his severed head.

And killed another and stoned another- There are few accounts of Old Testament prophets being killed or stoned. But beating, stoning and killing are Mosaic punishments for apostasy, and so the idea may be that Israel excused their lack of spiritual fruitfulness by judging as apostate the prophets who demanded this of them. This is typical- the unspiritual transfer their own anger with themselves and awareness of their own coming judgment onto others, whom they condemn as worthy of judgment and punishment.

21:36- see on 13:19.

Again, he sent other servants more than the first, and they did the same to them- The two groups of servants is unique to Matthew's account, and is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish distinction between the "former prophets" and the "latter prophets".

21:37 *And last of all he sent his son to them, saying: They will respect my son*- Lk. 20:13 adds "It may be that...". The Greek *isos* is tantalizingly hard to understand. It could mean 'Perhaps'; or equally it could mean 'They will, surely'. Lk. 20:13 adds "My beloved Son". Thus the joyful harvest song of Is. 5:1, the "song of my beloved", becomes the tragedy of "My beloved son". The invitation "O inhabitants of Jerusalem… judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard" (Is. 5:3) is matched by the rhetorical question: "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" (Lk. 20:15). This too was addressed by the Lord to Jerusalem's inhabitants.

We wonder of course how the Father could truly feel like this if He is omniscient. My suggestion is that He limits His omniscience in order to enter fully into our human experience; which means that His expressions of shock and disappointment are legitimate reflections of how He actually feels.

21:38 *But the husbandmen, when they saw the son, said among themselves*– That is, they conspired. This is quoting the LXX of Gen. 37:18. And the allusion is also to *"When they shall see him,* there is no

beauty that they should desire him" (Is. 53:2). "Shamefully handled" (Mk. 12:4) is s.w. Is. 53:3 LXX "despised".

This is the heir- The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Christ, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew him for who he was, they saw him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that he was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

Come, let us kill him and take his inheritance- Their assumption therefore was that the landlord must have died, for otherwise, killing the son would not have given them the inheritance. They acted, as we can, as if God is dead; although they would never have admitted that. The apparent non-action of God can likewise lead to the wrong impression that He is effectively dead. Seizing a vineyard for personal possession reminds us of Ahab’s actions in 1 Kings 21:15,16- making Naboth a type of Christ, and associating the Jewish religious leadership with wicked Ahab. However, Ahab did repent- and one wonders whether the Lord built in this allusion in reflection of His amazing hopefulness for Israel’s repentance. The allusion to Ahab may have been born in the Lord's Bible-saturated mind by the way that Isaiah 5:6 spoke of rain being withheld from the vineyard, as happened in Ahab and Elijah's time. The confirmation of Israel in their evil way was brought to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20; Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains

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21:39 *And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him*- Surely a reference to the Lord being crucified outside Jerusalem. In this case, the vineyard specifically speaks of Jerusalem and the temple. Mk. 12:8 appears in English to suggest a different order: Took, killed, cast out of the vineyard. But the Greek text doesn’t have to be read strictly chronologically. Strictly, they “took Him, killed and cast out of the vineyard”. The killed-and-cast-out need not be chronological. Or it could be that the Lord is teaching that effectively, they had killed Him before casting Him out and crucifying; the essence of the cross was ongoing in His life. That is clear enough in a number of Gospel passages.

”Cast Him out” has obvious connection to the way in which the Lord was crucified outside the city limits of Jerusalem. But 'cast him out' is parallel with the stone being "rejected" by the builders (:42). The 'casting out' therefore speaks of religious rejection from the community. The same word is used of how the Lord was cast out of Nazareth (Lk. 4:29), and how believers would be cast out from Judaism (Lk. 6:22) and the synagogue (Jn. 9:34); and even from the legalistic church (3 Jn. 10 "casts them out of the church"). Any who experience being cast out of the visible body of God's people are thereby fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Yet sadly the experience destroys many- when it can be taken as a share in His sufferings, knowing that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It is the same word used for the casting out of the rejected from the Kingdom to final condemnation (8:12; 22:13; 25:30; Lk. 13:28); those who cast out of the vineyard, the Kingdom (:43) will themselves be cast out of the Kingdom at the last day.

21:40 *When therefore the owner of the vineyard shall come, what will he*

do to those husbandmen?- The Lord Jesus said this with the cry still echoing in His ears concerning Himself: "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (:9). He clearly has Himself in view, 'coming' in behalf of His Father. His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was really an entering of Jerusalem in judgment upon them. His entry into Jerusalem and the temple was in essence the Lord of the vineyard coming. He certainly uses the language of the Lord coming with reference to Himself (23:39; 24:42,46,48; 25:19; Lk. 12:36).

21:41 *They said to him: He will miserably destroy those miserable men*- In the Greek, "miserable" [*kakos*] is related to "wicked" [*kakos*]. Those men will suffer their own wickedness. And just as the Jews said that those wicked men would be punished with their own wickedness, so out of their own mouths they were judged; in the same way as the Father had asked the Jews to "judge between Me and My vineyard", even though they were the vineyard (Is. 5:3). It would seem that the literal words of the rejected will be quoted back to them at the day of judgment (Lk. 19:22 "Out of your own mouth will I judge you"; Jude 15 "To convict all that are unGodly... of all their hard words"). This is just as David was invited to speak words of judgment on a sinner, and was told: "thou art the man". God will remember against Edom the specific words they spoke when Jerusalem fell (Ps. 137:7 RV). See on 12:37.

And will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen- The Lord's judgment is different. He will *give* the vineyard to the others (:44). And yet He will come and destroy the vineyard, and the new nation He will choose will not just give Him some of the fruit, but will themselves become part of the vine, and themselves bear fruit to Him (:43; Jn. 15).

Mk. 12:9 records that the Lord spoke of how the owner Himself would "come and destroy the husbandmen". This is a shocking change in tempo- the owner has appeared impotent, distant and naive, to the point that the husbandmen considered He was effectively dead. They reasoned that if they killed the Son, then the vineyard would be theirs. But this is exactly the nature of Divine judgment. The God who appears effectively dead, at least impotent, distant and naïve, will suddenly reveal Himself in direct judgment. We believe that now by faith, but it shall surely happen.

Who shall pay him the fruits in their seasons- Literally, 'times'. But for the Lord there is only one harvest. Once the fruit is ripe from the first harvest, then it will be reaped. Or it may be that God's aim is that we the husbandmen bring forth all the required fruits (of the spirit) "in their seasons". This indicates that over time, the various members of the body between them will bring forth every aspect of God's spirituality. The parable of the talents indicates how we have each individually been given something different by Christ. The parable of the pounds is along the same lines; as is the story of the Master who went away and left his

servants looking after the house. *Each* of them was given his own *separate* work to do (Mk. 13:34). This accounts for the way in which each of us will be judged according to our own works- i.e. according to how far we have done those things which Christ intended us personally to do.

21:42 *Jesus said to them: Did you never read in the scriptures*- They spent their whole lives reading Scripture, and Ps. 118 was a well known Passover Hallel. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

The stone which the builders rejected- The Lord would be "rejected of the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk. 8:31 s.w.); indeed, "rejected by this generation" (Lk. 17:25).

The same was made the head of the corner- If the builders rejected this stone, the implication is that another set of builders used it in another building, which became the temple of God. This is precisely the situation with the vineyard being taken away from the Jewish tenants and another group of workers being taken on. The quotation is seamlessly in context with the parable.

This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes- In whose eyes would the elevation and acceptance of the stone [a similar Hebrew and Aramaic word to "son"] be marvellous or miraculous / praiseworthy? The quotation is from Ps. 118:23. This Psalm is a dialogue between the speaker, who is in suffering and rejection and yet has hope of resurrection and glorious acceptance, and another group of people who sing or speak their response. This is why there are statements in the first person e.g. "The Lord is *my* strength... *I* will praise you", and then responses of the group: "It is marvellous in *our* eyes... *we* will rejoice and be glad... *we* have blessed you... the Lord has showed *us* light". Who is this group? The Psalm opens with instruction to "The house of Aaron... Israel... them that fear the Lord" to respond to the Messiah figure in praise (Ps. 118:2-4). The priesthood are often paralleled with all Israel, because it was God's intention that eventually all Israel should be a priestly nation. The significance of the quotation in Mt. 21:42 is that it was to be the intended response of the "house of Aaron", Israel's religious leaders, to the acceptance of the rejected stone / son of God. But it was the Lord's disciples who would make this response. They, therefore were the new "house of Aaron"- yet another hint that the Lord was creating a new Israel with another priesthood.

21:43 *Therefore say I to you: The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you*- The whole vineyard system is spoken of as the Kingdom of God. The Jewish people were therefore not the Kingdom of God- because the Kingdom was taken *from* them and given to others. They had been

instated as God's Kingdom at Sinai, but now, by implication, that status was being withdrawn from them.

And shall be given to a nation- In the singular. The various nationalities of the new group of workers are irrelevant, we are seen as one new nation, a new people.

Bringing forth the fruits of it- This is subtly different to 'rendering Him the fruits in their season' (:41). The new nation are no longer merely tenants, but are the vine themselves; the fruit is to be on them. And this is exactly the way the imagery of viticulture is used in Jn. 15. Spiritual fruit is the fruit of the Kingdom. The fruits of the Spirit in terms of personality traits, characteristics etc. are the fruits which will eternally be seen in the Kingdom. They are a firstfruits, a foretaste, of the Kingdom age. In John's terms, we are living the eternal life now, the kind of life which we shall eternally live.

21:44 *And he that falls on this stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust*- AV "Will grind him to powder". There is an unmistakable allusion here to the stone destroying the image, the Kingdoms of men, in Dan. 2:44. The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and break our bones, to get up and stumble on with our natural self broken in every bone; or to be ground to powder by the Lord at his return, to share the judgments of this surrounding evil world- being "condemned with the world...". Yet strangely (at first sight) the figure of stumbling on the stone of Christ often describes the person who stumbles at his word, who rejects it (Is. 8:14,15; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:7,8). In other words, through our spiritual failures we come to break ourselves, we become a community of broken men and women; broken in that we have broken our inner soul in conformity to God's will. As Simeon cuddled that beautiful, innocent baby Jesus, he foresaw all this: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again (resurrection) of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk. 2:34). If we are to share his resurrection, if we are to experience such newness of life in this life, we must fall upon him, really feel the cutting edge of his word. We must be broken now; or be broken and ground to powder at the judgment. See on 3:11.

21:45 *And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived*- The connection with Isaiah 5 was so clear, and that song of the vineyard was a well known passage understood as the justification for the destruction of the first temple.

That he spoke of them- Peri in this construction more means 'through'. They realized that their very own words of :41 were the Lord talking to them. They had been trounced, and stood self-condemned. And so they went blindly ahead in their hurt pride and confirmed it by planning to

murder the Son who had been sent to them. They should have stopped in their tracks and repented. They realized they had uttered the words of their own condemnation. The Lord Jesus had spoken to them through their own words. They were furious about it. The only options were to repent, to give in; or to go madly ahead, fuelled by the hurt pride of a moment, and do the unthinkable in murdering God's Son.

21:46 *And although they were seeking*- The very language of Herod seeking to destroy God's son (2:13,20). They were no better than the despised Herod.

To arrest him- The Greek for "Lay hands on / arrest" is likewise used for what Herod did to John the Baptist (14:3). The Lord uses the same word soon afterwards to describe how His servants will likewise suffer (22:6 "The remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and killed them"). The Lord intends us to see all our sufferings as part of His. Matthew repeatedly uses the word to describe how the Jews laid hands on the Lord to arrest and kill Him (26:4,48,50,55,57).

They feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet- We see the fickleness of the crowd. They were soon crying for the Lord's blood.

CHAPTER 22

22:1 *And Jesus answered and spoke again in parables to them, saying*- As often with the Lord's parables, He begins by setting up an expectation (in this case, of joy and fulfilment) which is then dashed by human failure, and turns very unpleasant and indeed calls forth the hardest judgments. The parable is clearly related to that of the wicked husbandmen at the end of chapter 21, and seeks to add more detail and justification for that judgment upon Israel. The feast can be understood as a betrothal feast, to celebrate the engagement of the Son, rather than speaking of the marriage supper of the Lamb. And yet it could also refer to this, in that this was planned and could have happened far earlier than it finally will do, just as in the previous parable, the time of fruit was ready right from the time of the sending of the first servant.

The parable is clearly quarried from Zephaniah 1:7,8: "The day of the Lord is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass... that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel". The context of Zephaniah is his appeal to Judah at Josiah's time (Zeph. 1:1), who had *appeared* to respond to Josiah's call to repent, but not in their hearts. It was exactly his "princes" who had apparently responded to his appeal for radical reformation (2 Chron. 34:29-32); but in Zeph. 1 they are condemned as insincere. This is clearly seen by the Lord as analogous to Israel having responded to John's attempted reformation- when their hearts were far from it, and eventually they like the Judah of Josiah's day were to be judged and have their city and temple burnt by the Gentiles.

22:2 *The kingdom of heaven is likened to a certain king, who made a marriage feast for his son*- The parable of the marriage supper is what "the Kingdom of heaven is like". As with so many of Christ's parables, this one too is quarried from the book of Proverbs; in this case Prov.9:2-5, which describes how wisdom makes everything ready for her feast. The food and wine which is there represents the wisdom of God. The Kingdom of God is therefore likened to this supreme feast on the knowledge of God. The Kingdom will therefore be a feast of such things. We love God in this life, but surely we cry out for a greater understanding and appreciation of Him? Do we not cry for wisdom, and lift up our voice for understanding? If we do have this feeling, then we will be supremely motivated to strive to reach that glorious time of true knowledge.

22:3 *And sent out his servants*- The parable is similar to that of the preceding parable of the wicked husbandmen. These servants are God's "servants the prophets" who in Old Testament times called Israel to repentance and the Kingdom. The term "servants" is used throughout the parable. The servants go again to Israel, and are beaten and killed (:4). Those "other servants" are perhaps the apostles in their witness to Israel after the Lord's death, whose rejection culminated in the burning up of

their city of Jerusalem (:7). More "servants" are then urgently sent to bring in anyone willing to say "yes". And they refer to our witness in this age. Yet it is also the "servants" who bind and destroy the rejected (:13). These servants are all "sent", *apostello*. There is a clear continuity between the witness of the prophets, the apostles and ourselves. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" in the sense that our preaching of Him is in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets (Rev. 19:10). Again we are all encouraged to see ourselves as brethren of the prophets; they were not, as Judaism supposed, some separate group of white faced saints. Our witness is the equivalent of being them in the new Israel. The "servants" who bind the man in condemnation refer in other parables to the Angels. It could be that we too do this work; or it may be that we're being shown that we are not only in a continuum with the Old Testament prophets and 1st century apostles, but are likewise inline with the Angels. Hence an Angel urged the apostle John that He was one with John and also "your brethren the prophets" (Rev. 22:9). We are not alone. We are in a direct line, on a continuum, with Angels, prophets and apostles, the *elohim* of the new Israel and new age created in Christ.

God's servants (the Old and New Testament prophets - Rev. 2:20; Acts 2:18; 4:29; Am. 3:7; Zech. 1:6) were sent by God "to call them that were bidden to the wedding: but they would not come" (Matt. 22:3). The Greek word for "call" being the same translated "bidden", we have here an example of the interplay between predestination and the calling of God through the Gospel - the word of the prophets/apostles 'called them who were (already) called' in God's purpose. This class must primarily refer to the Jews. The refusal to attend the wedding obviously equates with the Jewish rejection of Christ's work. God pleaded, "I have prepared my dinner", i.e. the Kingdom (Matt. 22:2). This corresponds with the Kingdom 'coming nigh' to Israel through the first century preaching of the Gospel (Luke 10:9,11) and the primary fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy in the run up to A.D. 70 (Mark 13:29).

To call them that were invited- Literally, 'to call the called'. Israel and in a sense all God's people were called from the foundation of the world. The allusion may be to the way in which people were invited to banquets, gave their agreement to attend, and then a servant was sent to actually take them to the banquet. But we should be aware that the language of 'calling the called' doesn't necessarily mean that there is a list of called ones, established from the beginning of the world, and our preaching is a hit and miss affair, sometimes reaching the 'called' and sometimes not, in which case our words were wasted. 'Calling the called' could equally mean that whoever hears the call is therefore and thereby 'called'. The invitation is to "whomsoever will", and the more people we call, the more are called. The urging of men to respond with the encouragement "whomsoever will..." is hardly appropriate if some cannot respond

because they were not 'called' from the beginning, were never on the list. And yet in the bigger picture, there clearly is an element of predestination involved with calling; and Paul references this in Romans as the ultimate example of grace. In the final picture, not all have heard the call. Because God's servants didn't take the call to all, and so for whatever reason, some are not called- and in that is the element of predestination. And yet the parable gives some further insight into this question. The first group of servants 'call the called', but the last group of servants after the burning of Jerusalem are urged to drag in whoever they can find. It's as if in Old Testament times, the appeal was to all within Israel, the called people. But now, all men can be called.

To the marriage feast- An engagement banquet, or the actual wedding? In either case, the principle is established that the Messianic banquet of the Kingdom could have come in Old Testament times; it could have come when the second set of servants [the apostles] made their appeal [in the first century up until the burning of the city in AD70]; and it will come whenever we as the servants of God in this age have finally gathered in enough potential guests. This is the same idea as in the preceding parable, where the harvest was ready, the time had 'drawn near', at the time of every appeal to Israel through the prophets. God's purpose is taught, time and again, to be open-ended and dependent upon Israel's response and our efforts in witness. For *when* the Gospel has gone to all the world, *then* shall the end come (24:14). The whole idea of a royal couple being kept waiting, in fact kept waiting for centuries and a few millennia, is shocking and tragic. We feel sorry for them, just as we in a sense feel sorry for the Father and Son. This unexpected delay in the wedding banquet is developed in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in chapter 25. Because of it, they all fell asleep when, according to the allusions to the parable in 1 Thess. 5, they should have stayed awake. It was a huge tragedy and shame all round, if we put the parables together.

But they would not come- The same words in 21:29 of the son who said "I will not" [work in the vineyard] but repented and went to work. The Lord wished to gather Jerusalem's children under His wings to save them from the great fire of destruction coming upon them, but they "would not" (23:37 s.w.). But in what practical way did they not want to come? The same words are used of how the Jews "would not" help their brother with the burden of human failure (23:4), or how the unforgiving debtor "would not" forgive his brother (18:30) and the older brother "would not" go in to the celebration banquet for the returned prodigal (Lk. 15:28). They "would not come" to Jesus in repentance (Jn. 5:40). Their refusal of the invitation to the Messianic banquet, to the Kingdom, was in terms of their attitude to others. Just as if we don't want a part in the church as the body of Christ, we don't want a part in Him.

22:4 *Again*- This and the use of the word "other" later in the sentence develops an impression of the King's continued effort with the guests.

He sent other servants, saying: Tell them that were invited- People are called to the Kingdom, and yet also called [s.w.] to repentance (9:13) and called to appear at judgment day (20:8). When we hear the call and respond, we begin our journey towards judgment day. That day, therefore, is not just for the baptized, but for any who heard the call and began the journey. The parable and teaching of Luke 14 show that we are those called, and yet we are also those who call others (Lk. 14:10,13). We are to reflect the grace of how we were called by calling others. The Greek *kaleo,* "call", isn't a passive word when used in the sense of inviting persons. It's from *keleuo,* to command or urge onwards. Our calling of others, and God's calling of us, involves an urging towards response.

Look, I have made ready my dinner- The obvious unreality of the story is that the dinner sits on the table, as it were, for centuries. But this is indeed the strangeness of God's openness to us. The time has always been ready, if human response and the effort of His servants has been enough. John's mission had been to "prepare" the way for Messiah (3:3 s.w.), through 'preparing' a people for Him (Lk. 1:17,76 s.w.). Although it had indeed been prepared, Israel didn't want it. A unique place in God's Kingdom has been "prepared" for each of us from the foundation of the world (20:23; 25:34 "Them for whom it has been prepared of My Father"; Jn. 14:2 "to prepare a place for you"; 1 Cor. 2:9 "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him"; Heb. 11:16 "He has prepared for them a city"; 1 Pet. 1:5 our salvation is "prepared" for us). The tragedy of the story is that such a wonderful feast had been "prepared"- the same word is found later in :4 "All things are *ready*" and in :8 "the wedding is *ready*". Perhaps this helps us understand the otherwise enigmatic words of the Lord to the Jews in Jn. 7:6: "Your time is always *ready*" (s.w.)- the time of establishment of the Kingdom, the time of the harvest in the previous parable of the labourers, was always potentially prepared and ready, it just depended upon Israel's acceptance of it.

My oxen and My fatlings are killed- Perhaps a reference to the end of the Mosaic system, or perhaps an intensive plural referring to the one great sacrifice that had been made in the Lord Jesus. "Oxen" or bulls are specifically spoken of as the animals which prefigured the Lord's sacrifice (Heb. 9:13; 10:4 s.w.). "Killed" translates *thuo*, the word for sacrifice. We could also note that the Greek word translated "prepared" is used about 15 times in the Gospels for the preparation of the last Passover, which was typical of the Lord's death.

And all things are ready- The same word for "prepared". Absolutely all things were prepared for the Messianic banquet, it really could have come in the first century.

Come to the marriage feast!- "Come" translates *deute*, which is a summons in the imperative. It's the same word used in "Follow Me" (4:19), "Come unto Me" (11:28; 19:21), "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom" (25:34). The wonder of what has been prepared coupled with the tragedy of it having been refused means that the Father is eager to compel people to accept it. This intense desire of the Father is to be ours as we in our day appeal to men to "come". In no way is God somehow passive and disinterested in human response, even if His apparent silence in the face of the rejection of His Kingdom may appear that way. Behind that apparent silence is an intense desire for our response. "Come unto", using *eis*, really means 'Come into'. This isn't simply an offer 'for your information', it is a willing desire to compel men to enter into the Kingdom through their response to the Gospel call.

We are on our way to judgment day, and that day is rushing towards us (cp. Lk. 14:31); the hearing of the Gospel is in itself a call to go forth and meet the Lord.

There are ample hints that this parable should also be given some reference to the burning up of Jerusalem in the last days. The prophetic "servants" of :4 who call Israel to repentance are matched by a singular "servant" in the similar parable in Lk. 14:17. There can be no doubt that such differences are designed. 'Elijah' and his latter-day school of prophets will minister the word to Israel, which would explain the use in the parables of "servant" and "servants" - the group of prophets being led by one particular prophet.

22:5 *But they made light of it*- The note of tragedy in "But..." mustn't be missed. This is the tragedy of human rejection of the Gospel of the Kingdom- the greatest things are prepared, but they are 'made light of' because the things of this life seem heavier. Israel's making light of the invitation is our warning, for Heb. 2:9 uses the same word here translated "made light": "How shall we escape, if we *neglect* such a great salvation". Paul uses the same word in urging Timothy not to "neglect" the gifts of potential service which he had been given (1 Tim. 4:14).

And went their ways- Albeit masked in translation, this one Greek word *aperchomai* is related to the word *erchomai* used in :3- "They would not *come*". Instead of going to the banquet, they went... to their various concerns. Two ways were therefore placed before them- to go the way to the banquet of the Kingdom, or go the ways of worldly cares. Although again concealed in most translations, this is the connection of thought with the unusual word *diexodos* translated "highways", literally 'the parting of the two ways', in :9. It was there, at the fork between two ways, that the appeal was to be made by the later servants.

One to his farm- Literally 'this one to his farm, this one to his trading'. We are thus invited to imagine these characters. Maybe the Lord was nodding His head towards passers by as He spoke these words. Banquets began in the evening [hence the man thrown out of it was thrown out into darkness, :13], and so this apparent element of unreality makes us interpret the Lord as meaning that *in their minds* they went off to their various secular concerns. For they would hardly be going off to those things in the evening. The farmer was presumably living at his farm when the servant came to take him to the banquet, so this going to his farm must be interpreted psychologically. Time and again we must remember that John's message, which had been primarily about the Lord and the need for repentance (Acts 19:4) had enjoyed amazing response. But it was all surface level response- even the baptisms. In their hearts, people made light of it and went off in their secular worries and concerns. This has biting relevance to us, who can be fully and positively engaged with the call to the Kingdom as we consider it in reading about it or listening to it preached in church. But that enthusiastic agreement with the message can so quickly and easily be displaced by the cares of this world. The Lord's parable of the sower was initially His commentary upon how the people had responded to John's message about Him and the Kingdom, but the cares of the world and other factors soon choked the growth of that seed.

Another to his business- Again, trading isn't done in the evening, which was when the banquet would have begun. The only other time the Lord uses this idea of trading or 'merchant-ing' in the Gospels is in speaking of the merchant man who sold up all he had in order to buy the pearl of great price, and thus quit his trading (13:45). The parable is alluding to the way in which invitations were sent out, accepted, and then a servant came to escort the invited person to the banquet. This generation had accepted the invitation in that they had accepted John's preaching. But when it came to actually entering the Kingdom, they were instead dominated by the cares of secular life. And it is exactly this, rather than any logical or intellectual difficulty in accepting the message, which is the real reason people turn down the invitation. "They made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" would imply that there was a period of crazy addiction to materialism among Jewry between the crucifixion and A.D. 70. This is confirmed by the epistles to the Jewish believers, notably James and Peter; it also finds a counterpart in our present 'last days'.

22:6 *While the rest seized his servants*- "Took /seized" means to lay hands on by force, and has just been used about the Jews' desire to arrest the Lord (21:46 "They sought to *lay hands on* Him"). And it's used in that connection when they did finally 'take' Him to death (26:4,48,50,55,57).

Treated them shamefully- Again, the very word used about the Lord's final sufferings: "He shall be *treated shamefully*" (Lk. 18:32). The point is, that the Lord's final crucifixion sufferings were to be shared by His people as they took His appeal to the Jews. Paul seems to have grasped this, for he uses this same word in precisely this context: "We were *shamefully treated*" by the Jews when preaching the Gospel to them (1 Thess. 2:2; Acts 14:5). Paul saw himself in the parables- just as we should. Paul describes himself as having been "shamefully entreated" when he brought the Gospel to Philippi (1 Thess. 2:2)- using the Greek word used in Mt. 22:6 concerning how the messengers sent to the vineyard were "entreated spitefully". And maybe Paul was consciously aware that the Lord Himself had spoken of how He would be "spitefully entreated" (Lk. 18:32) during His final sufferings. Hence Paul could speak of filling up the measure of Christ's sufferings through what he suffered whilst preaching Christ's Gospel (Col. 1:24).

And killed them- To put to death, the same word used about the Lord's crucifixion (16:21; 17:23; 21:38). The killing or slaying [s.w.] of the Son sent to the vineyard in 21:39 was to be repeated in the slaying of the first century preachers of the Gospel. Even today, our sufferings for preaching the Gospel are a share in the Lord's crucifixion sufferings.

The question arises: Why the extreme treatment of the servants by those invited, and why does the King react so devastatingly in destroying their entire city? Marriages of King's sons were political statements. Often the King's son would be pronounced as heir to the throne when he got married. The guests were invited in order to test their political loyalty to the King and his son. To refuse an invitation to a King's banquet was therefore highly significant- it was tantamount to a declaration of disloyalty. Even worse was to accept it, to proclaim loyalty to him and his son, and yet in practice not follow through with that declaration of loyalty. Israel's widespread acceptance of John, whose message was largely about Jesus (Acts 19:4), had been a declaration of loyalty to God and His Son. To not take it seriously in practice and to in fact turn against His Son was therefore the ultimate betrayal. This explains the King's anger, the wrath of God against Israel as a whole.

The persecution of the prophets connects with the same thing happening in Rev. 11, where the two witnesses make a similar last-minute appeal amidst great opposition. We have commented elsewhere how the true prophets within Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian invasion represented the Elijah ministry - and they too were persecuted. The servants were "entreated spitefully" (Mt. 22:6), as was our Lord on the cross (Luke 18:32). The righteous fellowship Christ's sufferings during the tribulation. The idea of persecuted servants occurs again in Rev. 11:18; 19:2, both of which passages have an application to latter-day persecution.

22:7- see on 22:11.
When the king heard- AV. When the news came to His ears. This may be just the furniture of the parable, or it may reflect the Old Testament impression given that God has a mechanism whereby He is informed of happenings on earth, e.g. of the wickedness of Sodom or the building of the tower of Babel. That mechanism presumably involves the Angels. "When the king heard thereof" implies that as soon as Israel's rejection of Christ came to God's notice, "he sent forth his armies... and burned up their city". This is similar language to Gen. 6:12; 11:5 and 18:21 concerning God 'noticing' man's wickedness at the time of the flood, Babel and Sodom. The judgments with which He reacted on those occasions were typical of the second coming. As Babylon burnt Jerusalem with fire, so it seems certain from many other prophetic references that literal fire will be used by Israel's enemies to inflict her final punishment. The Arab armies will therefore be those of God and Christ, as were those of Israel's earlier Arab invaders. They are called 'sanctified' in Joel 3:9 (A.V. mg.), i.e. 'separated unto' God's specific purpose in punishing Israel.

The King was angry- "Wrath [s.w.] upon this people" was what happened in AD70 (Lk. 21:23). New Testament references to the wrath of God are often specifically about His wrath with Israel for rejecting His Kingdom and His Son. Of particular interest is Eph. 2:3, where Paul writes of how he had been one of those who were "by nature the children of wrath". I suggest this refers to his being part of the generation of Jews who had rejected the Son of God; but now Paul could rejoice that God has "delivered us from the wrath to come" in AD70 (1 Thess. 1:10). In 1 Thess. 2:16 he specifically defines that "wrath" as God's wrath upon Israel. The fact he speaks of this as a past status which he had now come out of would make it hard to interpret this as any global statement about what it means to be human. I don't think this passage means that the wrath of God is upon every bearer of human nature. God's own Son had human nature but the wrath of God was not upon Him. God's wrath comes upon "the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6). To be a child of wrath therefore has no reference to physical birth, but is parallel to being a child of disobedience.

And he sent- A reference to the common Old Testament concept of the court of Heaven, whereby God is presented as reviewing evidence and sending out His Angels, His "hosts", in response. Those Heavenly hosts have hosts of soldiers on earth which they can move and use as they wish.

His armies- The Roman armies were God's armies, just as the Babylonians had been. Josephus appealed to the Jews in Jerusalem in AD70 in these terms: "It is God, therefore, it is God Himself who is bringing on this fire, to purge that city and temple by means of the Romans, and is going to pluck up this city, which is full of your pollutions"

(*The Jewish War* 6.2.1). The Romans being described as “his armies" connects with Dan. 9:26, where they are spoken of as "the people of the prince" - Jesus. We must take the lesson that we can be strongly used by God, but this is no guarantee at all that we are His people.

And destroyed those murderers- Using the word for "destroy" which the Jews had just used in 21:41, saying in response to the parable of the wicked labourers that they should indeed by "destroyed". Out of their own mouths they were to be judged. The 'destruction' of the Jews for persecuting and killing the Lord Jesus and His apostles was in AD70, when their city was burned up. But the same word is that used in John when the Lord taught that those who believed in Him would not "perish" or be destroyed (Jn. 3:15,16; 10:28). Whatever else may be referred to in this teaching, it could also have simply meant in the first context that those Jews who believed in Christ would not be destroyed in the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70. The same word is used by Peter in predicting the perishing / destruction of the Jewish 'heavens and earth' in AD70 (2 Pet. 3:6,9). This destruction, however, was not going to touch those who were in Christ. They would not "perish" or be destroyed. For in the terms of the parable, they were not the murderers.

And burnt their city- The burning of Jerusalem in AD70. The Roman soldiers who actually did this were directly moved and controlled by God to do so. Stephen used the same word when accusing the Jews of being Christ's "betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:52). The Romans being described as “his armies" connects with Dan. 9:26, where they are spoken of as "the people of the prince" - Jesus.

22:8 *Then he said to his servants*- We are meant to imagine how they felt. The previous servants had been at best ignored, others beaten and killed. And now... it was for them to go out with the same message? We too should not fail to see the cost involved in the work of the Gospel, for we stand in direct continuum with the persecuted prophets and preachers who have gone before us. It may even be that by following the Lord's instructions to persuade all men, bad and good, to enter the Kingdom, simply on the basis of them saying 'yes', we will suffer isolation and rejection from our own brethren. And that too would be a sharing in His crucifixion sufferings, and taking our place in the sufferings of the Gospel. The work of the Gospel, if done properly, can never ultimately be 'fun' or purely pleasurable.

The wedding is ready...- This statement seems so obvious it doesn't need to be made. But it is made in order to motivate the servants in their efforts to get at least someone somewhere to say "yes". They were being asked to do something most unusual- to just grab anyone and urge them to come in to a King's banquet without a prior invitation and agreement, as was the norm. This appeal to secular people *without* the prior invitation

was so wonderful and unusual that the very unusualness of it would be hard for both preacher and listener to accept. Surely there was a catch somewhere... And so often when we present the things of the Kingdom to people, their honest response is that 'Can that really be... it sounds just too fantastic'. This is the difficulty with the level and depth of grace we are asked to believe in and share. It is so unusual and out of our experience that we find it hard to believe for real.

But they that were invited were not worthy- John's appeal had been to bring forth fruit "worthy" [s.w.] of repentance (Lk. 3:8). They had initially agreed to this, but hadn't come up with the fruit. Paul surely had this part of the parable in mind when he turned away from preaching to the Jews and went to the Gentiles, because the Jews had "judged [themselves] unworthy [s.w.] of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46).

The parable of the marriage feast highlights the tragedy of Jewish rejection of what could have been theirs. There will be an ever-increasingly vigorous preaching campaign by the "servants", seeing that "they which were bidden were not worthy" (Mt. 22:8) - the Greek perhaps implying not enough numerically. As a result of this preaching, "the wedding was furnished ('filled' - numerically) with guests" (Mt. 22:10). This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Once the required number of converts is made, then the supper can begin. Their appeal being to "the poor... maimed... halt and... blind" suggests that the marginal and desperate within society will be those who respond- and this is happening right now in the triumphant progress of preaching in our day. The servants are sent "into the highways" (Mt. 22:9), one possible meaning of the Greek is 'a market square'. This must be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th hour (Mt. 20:6,7). The very short probation of those 11th hour workers will match that of the latter-day converts. And again, it was the old and weak who nobody wanted to hire. See on 28:20.

22:9 *Therefore, go*- Leading up to "go therefore and teach all nations".

To the main roads- AV "Highways*".* See on :5 *Went their ways.* The RV offers: "unto the partings of the highways". The point from which He foresaw us making our appeal was a fork in the road. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe or perish. The art of preaching seems to be to bring people to perceive that they stand at a fork in their life's journey, they can take the road to the Kingdom or the road of temporary absorption in the things of this life. The point from which He foresaw us making our appeal was a fork in the road. We are to appeal to men and women with the message that there is no third road; that it truly is a case of believe

or perish. *Diexodos* can also be understood as the place of crossing the city boundaries, out into the countryside- a possible hint at taking the invitation beyond Jerusalem, for the work of the Gospel was to begin in Jerusalem and spread outwards (Lk. 24:47).

Another possible meaning for the term is 'a market square'. This would then be designed to recall the parable of the labourers standing idle in the market place at the 11th hour (Mt. 20:6,7). In the Septuagint this word *diexodos* describes "the *issues* from death" (Ps. 68:20), the *waters* of death (2 Kings 2:21), "*rivers* of water" (Ps. 1:3), "*watersprings*" (Ps. 107:35). If this usage was in the Lord's mind [and I am unsure it definitely was], then the idea would be that people were to be called from their seeking of water to seeking the water of life eternal; to exchange their secular passions and concerns for a concern about eternity.

And as many as- The phrase could possibly imply that there was a specific number that had to be found and invited. That certainly is the teaching of the parable overall. Therefore the more people we invite, the quicker the wedding begins. The repetition of the phrase in :10 suggests that the servants were obedient to the instruction, strange as it was- to scrap the idea of a guest list and invite people from the street, bad or good, to a royal banquet which was getting cold on the table, without any pre-invitation or agreement to attend having been given by the people.

You shall find, invite them to the marriage feast- The Lord Jesus is described as "finding" His people- the lost sheep, lost son, the idle workers in the marketplace (Mt. 20:6; Lk. 15:5,6,8,9); and yet He sends us out to "find" [s.w.] those who are to be invited into His Kingdom, just as the disciples 'found' fish when they obeyed the Lord's commission to fish (Jn. 21:6). We do the Lord's work for Him in this sense. And yet of course people "find" the narrow way themselves, they "find" the treasure and pearl of the Gospel (Mt. 7:14; 13:44,46); but only because we have gone out and 'found' them. The Lord's finding of us leads to us doing His work in finding others for Him and on His behalf. Thus Jesus "finds" Philip, and Philip's response is to go and 'find' Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). And so it must be ours too. Just as the disciples 'found' fish when they obeyed the Lord's commission to fish (Jn. 21:6). We do the Lord's work for Him in this sense.

It was totally scandalous that the majority of guests refused an invitation by the King (Mt. 22:9; Lk. 14:21-23), and that whilst the dinner was cold on the table, a desperately urgent expedition was sent to get people to come in and eat it. This is the urgency of our Gospel proclamation. And no King or wealthy man would really invite riff-raff off the street into his party; yet this is the wonder of God's grace in calling us through the Gospel. And such is the tragedy of humanity's rejection of the Gospel. To

reject a royal invitation was tantamount to rejecting a royal command. It was unheard of in the time of Jesus. Yet people just don't perceive the honour of being invited by the King. Notice too how it is the King Himself who makes all the arrangements- not, as the initial hearers would have expected, a senior steward or his wife. But the King Himself. And this reflects the extraordinary involvement of God Almighty in personally inviting each of us to fellowship with Him, through the call of the Gospel. Likewise that *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom (Mt. 25:5) is unusual- they must have been a pretty lazy, switched off bunch.

22:10 *And those servants went out into the highways*- The same word in Mk. 16:20 "They *went out* and preached everywhere", just as the sower "went out" to sow, with varying response (Lk. 8:5 s.w.).

And gathered together- Just as the net in the sea of nations gathered together fish "of every kind" (Mt. 13:47 s.w.)- here they are called "both bad and good". The suggestion may be that one intention of preaching is to gather people together into one. Hence the language of gathering together. The figure of the Lord's servants gathering together His called ones is exactly the figure of the gathering to the final judgment (s.w. Mt. 13:30; 25:32). By inviting people to Christ we are inviting them to the day of judgment. Knowledge of the Gospel thereby brings responsibility to the day of judgment. The moment we respond, we begin our journey to judgment. The Lord seems to have developed the thought of this parable in His later teaching in 25:35,38, where the same Greek word translated "gathered together" is translated 'to take in'; the Lord said that those who gathered together or took in a stranger had accepted Him, and those who refused to do so had rejected Him personally. 'Stranger' was understood to refer to a Gentile. The Lord might be saying that our gathering in of the Gentiles, the strangers, the despised, is related to our salvation; and if the early Jewish believers refused to gather in the Gentiles, then the Lord would take that as a personal rejection of Him. Those who refuse to gather in others because they consider them not to know enough or to not be appropriate material may well be under this threat of condemnation by the Lord.

All as many as they found- The specific use of the word "all" here adds nothing, surely, unless the idea is that there is a specific number who must "all" be gathered to the banquet. Rom. 11:25 says this in so many words, in talking of how the 'full number of the Gentiles' must "come in"- *ex-erchomai*. The same word *erchomai* is used in 22:3 about how the invited would not "come".

Both bad and good- This is quite radical for many Christian preachers today. There was *not* to be any thought about whether the persons being brought to the banquet were bad or good. The focus was upon simply

persuading them to come in, to say yes to the most unusual invitation. Just as the servants of an earlier parable were told not to worry about dividing the wheat from the weeds, so here, the servants were not to worry about the impressions they had about the worthiness or sincerity of people. Their job was to persuade them to say 'yes' and to come on in. So much outreach today is tacitly concerned with what kind of person is being brought in to the community of believers. And even more concern is expressed about who exactly sits at the Lord's table. But according to this parable, the general public are to be encouraged to say "yes" to the Kingdom invitation, and come in and sit at the banquet table, the breaking of bread. Only then, once they are sitting there, does the Lord come and judge who is bad and good. The implication could possibly be that He comes to inspect us at the breaking of bread, both mystically every time we break bread, and literally in that His coming may be at the breaking of bread.

And the wedding was filled with guests-When the wedding is "filled with guests" as a result of the final appeal to absolutely all men, 'all you can see / perceive', then the wedding starts (Mt. 22:9,10 Gk.). "Filled" translates *pletho*, which carries the sense of being filled up. When the full number of guests are seated, when a certain number of true converts to the Kingdom feast have been made, *then* the King comes in, and the wedding starts. This is what imbues our latter day witness with such a sense of urgency. Every baptism or invitation to the Kingdom could be the last. "They which were bidden were not worthy" (:8) - the Greek could imply not enough numerically. This indicates that in some ways, God does work to a number. Whilst there may be reference here to an appeal to Gentiles, the implication is that it will be to Jews in particular. The servants go "into the streets and lanes of the city" (Lk. 14:21), i.e. Jerusalem.

"Guests" are literally, recliners at the table. The word is usually translated like this in its 14 occurrences in the New Testament. In a sense, the banquet had begun- even before the King entered to review the guests. Just as the Kingdom experience, crystallized and epitomized in the breaking of bread, has begun for all who respond. Although this is no guarantee of ultimate acceptance by the King. The contrast between recliners at table and servants is brought out in Lk. 22:27: "For which is greater, he that reclines at table [s.w. "guest"], or he that serves? Is not he that reclines at table?". In the parable, we are asked to identify ourselves with the servants. Our audience are the recliners at table. In the context of preaching, of bringing people in to the banquet, we are to consider our audience greater than us and to approach them with every respect. Our witness to them, therefore, is a serving of them; not a showing off to them of our superior Bible knowledge, the superiority of our positions over theirs.

According to Luke's version of an earlier telling of the parable [with some differences], the King Himself invited beggars into His feast. This also stands out as strange... what kind of king is this? And what fortunate beggars. Immediately, we have the lesson powerfully brought home to us. And why ever would a guest refuse the wedding garment offered to him on entry to the feast (Mt. 22:11)? The element of unreality in the story makes it stand out so clearly. And yet ask people why they are not baptized, why they are refusing the righteous robes of Christ, the call of the Gospel... and it is anything from clear and obvious to them. The scandal of the parable hasn't struck them. And there's another strange element to the story. Whilst the supper is still getting cold, the King sends off a military expedition (Mt. 22:7,8), but this is incidental to his desire to get on with the feast with his guests. Surely the message is that what is all important for the Father and Son is our response to their invitation, our desire to be at that feast, our turning up there- and the punishment of the wicked is not that significant on their agenda, even though it has to be done.

22:11 *But when the king entered to see the guests*- The same words used about the Lord's 'coming in' to Jerusalem and looking around the temple, in His parody of a triumphant entry (21:10,12). This was the immediate context of this parable, and the point was that He had come to judge Israel and found them unworthy.

He saw there- We are set up by the story line to expect that the King will question "the bad" out of the "both bad and good" which have been gathered. But instead He focuses upon the lack of a wedding garment. Banquets functioned on the basis of the guests arriving, accompanied by a servant, who then gave them a wedding garment, which they wore. This man obviously thought that his clothes were good enough, and he didn't need the wedding garment offered. This man would likely have been in what appeared to be "the good" category, the type who was well dressed and apparently appropriate for invitation to a King's banquet. It was exactly those types who will be ultimately rejected from the Kingdom banquet, because self righteousness, a refusal to be clothed in the white garment of imputed righteousness, is far worse than being an immoral street person.

A man who was not wearing a wedding-garment- Literally 'not clothed with the wedding clothing'. We are to 'put on' [s.w.] Christ; and "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have *put on* Christ" (Gal. 3:27). But baptism only 'works' if we believe in what it represents- our clothing with His righteousness by the imputation of righteousness to us. Clearly enough, before the coming of the King, those without a wedding garment [obtained through faith and baptism] are sitting in the same place as those who have one. They sit at the same table- the division is only made by the Lord’s coming.

22:12 *And he said to him: Friend*- Another element of unreality, because a King would hardly address a street person as "Friend". But this is how close the King of the Universe feels to any who have at least responded to the call, even if they have to be rejected. The Lord foretells the spiritual culture which He will show even to the rejected, when He mentions how He will call the rejected "friend" (Mt. 22:12), using the same word as He used about Judas (Mt. 26:50). Vine describes it as a word meaning "comrade, companion, a term of kindly address expressing comradeship". If this is how the Lord will address those who have crucified Him afresh- surely there is hope, abundant hope, for us. The suggestion is that there are Judases amongst us, although we can't identify them (and shouldn't try), just as the disciples couldn't. The evil servant who (in Christ's eyes) beat his brethren was a hypocrite, he didn't appear to men to be like that (Mt. 24:48-51); he was only cut asunder, revealed for who he was, at the judgment. He appeared to be an ecclesial elder who loved the flock.

How did you come in here without a wedding-garment?- Obviously a rhetorical question, rather like God's question to Adam: "Where are you?". The King knew. The purpose of the day of judgment is to explain to the rejected why they have been rejected- and it is this realization which is itself the punishment, for it will elicit from them weeping and gnashing of teeth in anger with themselves. Jude 12 speaks of false believers as being spots marring the love feast. There will be such persons at the breaking of bread meetings of the believers, but this parable teaches that it is the King who reveals and removes them, at the last day. It is our duty to simply gather men and women into the Kingdom, both bad and good, just as the net gathers both bad and good fish, but they are only separated from each other when the judgment sits at the last day.

Judgment day is not only for our personal education and humbling. It is for the enlightenment of us all as a community, in that there is fair evidence that in some sense the process of judgment will be public, and all the believers will see the true characteristics of those with whom they fellowshipped in this life. Thus the unworthy will be revealed as being without a wedding garment, and the faithful will see him (for the first time) as walking naked and in shame (Mt. 22:11; Rev. 16:15).

And he was speechless- Other pictures of the rejected describe them as having plenty to say in self-justification ("When did we see you...", 25:44, "You are a hard man", Lk. 19:22). But in this picture, they are speechless. It's possible to put the various pictures of the judgment together and create a chronological impression of them initially knocking

on the door pleading for acceptance, justifying themselves, and then being left speechless in the ultimate darkness and loneliness. Or it could be that different ones of the condemned respond in different ways, some with words, some in silence.
22:13 *Servant*s- In the Lord's other parables, it's the Angels who carry out he condemnation of the rejected. But in this parable, the prophets, Angels, apostles and Christian preachers are all called "servants", encouraging us to see ourselves as of equal significance and meaning in God's Kingdom plan as the other servants.

22:13 *Then the king said to the servants: Bind him hand and foot*- It is the reapers, who represent the Angels (13:39), who bind the rejected for destruction in 13:30. The 'binding' suggests that the rejected will desperately want to be in the Kingdom, to the point they would even forcibly push their way in. Nobody will be indifferent at the last day; all will want more than anything to be in the Kingdom. And this should be our view now.

And throw him- The Lord uses this picture three times, using the same words for 'casting out' and 'darkness' (8:12; 25:30). The implication is that these people were within the light of the Kingdom banquet, and then are taken out of it into the darkness outside. This is why having a positive feel and sense about our presence amongst God's people is not of itself any guarantee of our final salvation; for some will be ejected from that into the darkness of condemnation.

The language used here for the condemnation of the rejected ['bind... take away... cast away'] is also used about the Lord's final sufferings and death. He too was bound (s.w. 27:2; Jn. 18:24; and the only other Gospel reference to being bound hand and foot is to the dead Lazarus in Jn. 11:44, as the term implied 'death'). 'Taken away' translates the same Greek word used about the 'taking up' of the cross (16:24; 27:32) and the cry 'Away with Him [to the cross]!' in Jn. 19:15. 'Cast away / out' is the same word used to describe how the wicked husbandmen killed and then 'cast out' the Son, representative of the Lord Jesus (21:39); it is also used of how "the prince of this world" was to be 'cast out' at the crucifixion (Jn. 12:31). Whether or not that prince refers to the Lord Jesus is an open question, however. The 'outer darkness' would then connect with the darkness at the crucifixion, and the "weeping" with the weeping for the death and suffering of Christ (s.w. Mk. 16:10; Lk. 23:28; Jn. 16:20). Why this similarity between the language of the Lord's death, and that of condemnation? Surely because on the cross, the Lord was treated as if He were a condemned sinner, even though He personally never sinned. So close was His identity with sinners and their condemnation. He can identify, therefore, even with the rejected; He is not like a human judge, who hands down punishments which he has nowhere near experienced himself. The Lord carefully designed His parables and

teachings; their various elements are clearly intended to dovetail with each other. It is therefore no accident that He uses the same language for His condemnation to death and the condemnation of the wicked at the last day. He consciously identified with them.

Outside into the darkness , where there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth- The rejected are described as being cast into outer darkness. This is even an Old Testament concept: "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in the blackest darkness" (Prov. 20:20 RV). The rejected will be "pursued into darkness" (Nah. 1:8 RV). It is doubtful whether this darkness is literal, unless there will be a specific geographical location into which they are driven which is totally dark. Mt. 22:13 might imply this by saying that "there", in the darkness into which the rejected are cast, there will be weeping. It perhaps more implies a depression so deep that everything loses its colour. There is no point in existence, no meaning to anything. It could be that "darkness" is to be understood as blindness, which is how it is sometimes used in Scripture. "The eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall have no way to flee. And their hope shall be the giving up of the spirit" (Job 11:20 RV). This is all the language of the final judgment. They will seek death and hope for it, because existence in the state of condemnation is simply unbearable. But remember that outside of Christ, mankind is likewise in such an unbearable state, if only he will perceive it. He is even now in a figurative furnace of fire.

22:14- see on 24:5.
For many are called but few chosen- When the Lord said that many are called but few chosen, He was actually alluding to a well known saying from 4 Ezra 8:3: “Many have been created, but few shall be saved”. He was as it were raising the bar. It was to be a minority of those called, not just a minority of all creation, who were to be saved. In the context of the parable, the servants call many; but only relatively few are chosen, in that few chose to really accept the gift of imputed righteousness in the garment of Christ. Although only one such person is detailed in the parable, this final observation could imply that the majority of those invited will be ejected. The language of 'chosen' is maybe used to emphasize that it is our duty to call people into the banquet; it is not for us to choose who will ultimately be accepted, because that is not our work.

22:15 *Then the Pharisees went and plotted*- The Greek suggests they went away from Him and held a conference. They found strength in numbers; we wonder how many were individually convicted of their position.

How they might trap him in his talk- The same word used of how *they* were to be entangled in condemnation (Lk. 21:35; Rom. 11:9).

As they treated the Lord, so they were treated. Our attitude to Him is in a way our attitude to ourselves and our eternal destiny.

22:16 *And they sent to him their disciples*- The use of *apostello* ["sent out"] and *mathetes* ["disciples"] obviously recalls the use of these words concerning the Lord sending out *His* disciples. Just as the kingdoms of Babylon and Assyria are described in terms of *God's* Kingdom, thus making them anti-Kingdoms of God and their leaders antiChrists, so the Jewish system of the first century was a parody of God's Kingdom as it was exemplified in the Lord and His group of followers.

Along with the Herodians- The Pharisees and Herodians were sworn enemies. Herod was anathema to the Pharisees, who saw him as a false Jew and some kind of antiChrist figure. But a theme of the Lord's judgment and death was that His enemies were united together by a common hatred of Him.

Saying: Teacher. We know that you are true- Lk. 20:21 adds that they also said at this point: "You say and teach *rightly*", Gk. *orthos*, from whence 'orthodox'. They were thereby trying to lead Him to make a right wing, conservative answer, namely, that tribute should be given to God and not Caesar. And then the Herodians could legally swoop upon Him and have Him arrested for disloyalty to the empire.

And teach the way of God in truth- John the Baptist had attempted to prepare the way or path over which God's glory in Messiah could come to Zion. The only other occurrence of "the way of God" is when we read that Apollos, who knew only John's teaching, had to have "the way of God", i.e. John's message about the way, explained more fully to him (Acts 18:26). It may be that John had been so unworldly that he had not paid tribute to Caesar, or at least, he had been interpreted that way; and so now the Pharisees were commenting that if the Lord truly upheld John's teaching, then what was his answer about paying the tribute money? Because it was perceived, at very least, that John had advocated not paying it.

And care not for anyone- That was, in a sense, the impression which people took of Jesus. The same words and accusation about His not caring for people are to be found on the lips of the disciples, in the same words (Mk. 4:38 "Don't you care that we perish?"; Martha thought the Lord 'didn't care' that she was serving alone, Lk. 10:40). In reality, it was the hireling who cared not for the sheep (Jn. 10:13 s.w.), and the Lord was the one who cared for them so much that He died for them. That the most caring man of all time and space could be so misunderstood, even by His closest followers, is encouragement to us when we feel so globally misunderstood. We are thereby fellowshipping part of the Lord's sufferings and existential loneliness.

For you regard not the person of men- This again was an appeal to Jewish orthodoxy, whereby the righteous Jew was supposed to be obedient to God regardless of what others thought. They were trying to lead the Lord into a position whereby He said 'No' to the question about giving the tribute money. And the Herodians were ready to pounce on Him if He did. We can reconstruct how the Pharisees and Herodians worked together in this; the Pharisees were trying to lead the Lord by a path of theology and logic to a position whereby He denied the need to pay tribute- and then Herod's supporters could pounce on Him. The verisimilitude and internal agreement of the record is again strong encouragement to accept this as the inspired word of God, recording he actual words spoken rather than giving a mere summary or imagination of them from a distance of time and space.

22:17 *Tell us therefore, what you think*- If all the flattering things they had said in :16 were indeed true, then what on this basis was His view of the tribute money?

Is it lawful- This was purposefully vague, because they didn't clarify whether they meant the law of Moses or that of Rome. This was part of the trap. If the Lord said it was lawful according to Roman law, then they could accuse Him of breaking the law of Moses. If He said it was lawful according to the Law of Moses, and therefore that law must surely be obeyed, then He was breaking the law of Rome. But the Lord majestically rises above the trap, by (as usual) taking the whole issue to a far higher level.

To give tribute to Caesar, or not?- The word translated "tribute" was used by the Jews for the poll tax of Ex. 30:12-16; the argument was that this should be paid to the temple and not to Gentiles. By pushing the Lord for a yes / no answer, they thought they would force Him into an untenable position. Judas of Galilee had agitated about not paying the tribute money to the Romans (Acts 5:37) and had been executed for this in around AD6, in recent memory. The Lord as always appealed to higher principle- if it has Caesar's image, then give it to him; but what has God's image, your own body, then give it to God. The giving of our entire person to God made paying an annual tax to the temple seem cheap and irrelevant.

22:18 *But Jesus perceived their wickedness and said: Why do you test me?*- The wickedness could be their hypocrisy, which the Lord goes on to comment upon. But their "wickedness" could refer to their personal sins, and because in that moment the Lord perceived those sins, He thereby perceived their hypocrisy and therefore challenged them about their hypocrisy. He may have been given that perception of their sins by some flash of Divine insight, or it could be that His supreme sensitivity to people led Him to imagine correctly the kind of stuff going on in their

secret lives.

You hypocrites!- In what were they hypocritical in this matter? Perhaps they quietly paid the tribute money? Or perhaps it was because in order to answer the question, the Lord made them bring the coin through the temple courts, thus breaking their own laws- see on 22:19 *Shew me... they brought.* They should've been more concerned about the huge gap between their professions and their practice, rather than focusing upon finding error in another. And so it is to this day- fault finding in others over religious matters typically hides serious hypocrisy, the concern with personal sin is transferred into concern about others' sin. Our sense we ought to be self-examining is converted into an examination of others.

22:19 *Show me the tribute money. And they brought to him a denarius*- The Pharisees claimed that pagan coinage should not be brought into the temple courts. This is why the coin had to be brought to the Lord. By so doing, the Lord was purposefully provoking the Pharisees; likely the Herodians (:16) brought it, not the Pharisees. In any case, we see yet another powerful evidence that the historical records of the Gospels are true to the very smallest detail.

The tribute money had the inscription *Tiberius Caesar Divi Augusti Filius Augustus Pontifex Maximus*- "Tiberius Caesar, august son of the divine Augustus, High Priest". Pedants would've quickly assumed that such blasphemous language and appropriation of titles appropriate to the Lord Jesus would mean that such coinage should not be used, nor should such tribute be paid to any man on this basis. But the Lord saw a bigger picture. He was quite OK with such token behaviours, but the far bigger issue was giving to God our own bodies and lives which bear His image.

The coin bore an image which strict Jews considered blasphemous, denoting Tiberius as son of God, the divine Augustus. The Lord doesn't react to this as they expected – He makes no comment upon the blasphemy. He lets it go, but insists upon a higher principle. 'If this is what Caesar demands, well give it to him; but give what has the image of God, i.e. yourself, to God'. He didn't say 'Don't touch the coins, they bear false doctrine, to pay the tax could make it appear you are going along with a blasphemous claim'. Yet some would say that we must avoid touching anything that might appear to be false or lead to a false implication [our endless arguments over Bible versions and words of hymns are all proof of this]. The Lord wasn't like that. He lived life as it is and as it was, and re-focused the attention of men upon that which is essential, and away from the minutiae. Staring each of us in the face is our own body, fashioned in God's image – and thereby the most powerful imperative, to give it over to God. Yet instead God's people preferred to ignore this and argue over the possible implication of giving a coin to Caesar because there was a false message on it. Morally and dialectically

the Lord had defeated His questioners; and yet still they would not see the bigger and altogether more vital picture which He presented them with.

22:20 *And he said to them: Whose is this image and superscription?*- He was setting them up for His point that whatever bears God's image and superscription is to be given to Him (:21); and that refers to our body and whole lives. We have His signature on us; perhaps the Lord had in mind by this the idea that Israel were God's covenant people, His servants bearing His marks.

22:21 *They said to him: Caesar's. He then said to them: Therefore give to Caesar*- The Jews were looking for immediate deliverance from Caesar. The Lord's parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem was designed to show that He was not bringing that kind of a Kingdom, that sort of salvation. By saying that tribute must indeed be rendered to Caesar, He was further dashing their Messianic hopes concerning Him, and further demonstrating that He was not the Messiah they were looking for. Thus He was consciously bringing about a situation whereby His popularity was turned into hatred, because of the whole psychology of dashed expectations making love turn to hate. The accusation that "We found this fellow... forbidding to give tribute to Caesar" (Lk. 23:2) was so utterly untrue.

The things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's- What bears God's image, which is our whole body and mind (Gen. 1:26), is to be given to God. We have God's superscription written upon us, moreso if we are in Christ (Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100 RV). We must be His in practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

The things which are God's are to be 'rendered' to Him. The Greek word means to pay back, to return; even giving our very bodies only giving back what He has given us. The same word had been used recently by the Lord in teaching that we have a huge debt to God which must be 'rendered' or paid back to Him (Mt. 18:25,26,28). We can read the Lord's words here as meaning that concerns about pedantic issues relating to coinage are irrelevant compared to the paramount issue- that we owe God everything. This would explain why the Lord says this after having accused them of being hypocrites, having perceived the sin they were involved with (see on :18). Because we are created in God's image, the structure of our very bodies is an imperative to give ourselves totally to His cause (Mt. 22:19-21). Whatever bears God's image- i.e. our very bodies- must be given to Him. "It is he that hath made us, and [therefore] we are his" (Ps. 100:3 RV). We must be His in

practice *because* He is our creator. So it is not that we merely believe in creation rather than evolution; more than this, such belief in creation must elicit a life given over to that creator.

22:22 *And when they heard it, they marvelled and left him and went away*- The record is making a clear connection back to the use of the same word in the preceding parable, where the Jews "went their way" (:5) having been invited to the banquet, off to their immediate concerns. The Lord had challenged them to give themselves to God, seeing they were made in His image, and stop worrying about petty issues such as the writing on a coin. This challenge was another form of the invitation to the banquet. They perceived what He was saying- for they "marvelled". Just as the Jews heard the invitation to the banquet. But they went their way- and that way was the way to crucifying the Lord, killing the messenger of God. Going that evil way is thus paralleled with going the way of petty materialism.

Lk. 20:26 concludes that "They could not take hold of His words before the people". The Greek for "take hold" is elsewhere used about the Jews finally taking hold of the Lord in arrest and crucifixion. The Jews are also recorded as not being able to do this physically to Him in public, "before the people". But Luke speaks of the Jews doing these things in relation to "His words". This is Luke's way of saying what John says in so many words- that the Lord Jesus was so identified with His words, which were God's words, that He was "the word made flesh", the living personification of His own words, in whom there was perfect congruence between His essential self and His words.

22:23 *The same day Sadducees*- Surely added to give the impression of intensity. The Lord came to His death at the point of mental as well as physical exhaustion.

That say that there is no resurrection- The obvious response to a question from such people about the resurrection would be 'But you don't believe in a resurrection!'. Lk. 20:27 says that they *antilego,* spoke against publicly, the resurrection. Mark's record adds that they also said that "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise…" (Mk. 12:23). But the Lord was not so primitive as to point out their obvious untruth. He took their position as they stated it, and worked to demonstrate that even given that position, they were woefully ignorant of Divine truth. Long term, His approach stood a chance of working. If He had simply denounced them as liars and self-contradictory, there was no chance He would've ever contributed towards their possible repentance and change of heart. This approach needs to be take to heart by us. For there are large numbers of believers who seem to think that their service to God involves cruising internet forums or endlessly arguing with their neighbours in order to prove them wrong and self-contradictory about doctrinal matters. This may give a slight ego rush for a moment, but it is

not in fact any real victory. For the victory we seek is not to tie another up in mental knots, but to lead them to repentance, to the Lord Jesus, and to His Kingdom. We also need to note that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord could've called many witnesses to the resurrection of Lazarus, but instead He takes their argument and works from it.

It has been observed that the Sadducees were generally hedonistic- and this surely was a result of their denial of the future resurrection and judgment. Their belief was that only the Torah was inspired, and it was Israel's duty to live according to it in this life. They were a parade example of the effect of doctrine in practice.

Came to him, and they asked him- Over 100 times we read in the Gospels of various people coming to Jesus- His enemies, the crowds, His disciples, people in need. Each came with their various motivations, agendas and pre-understandings of Him. His invitation to 'come to Him' was to come *in faith*. The repeated repetition of the phrase 'came to Him' is perhaps to invite us to see ourselves likewise as amongst those who 'come to Him' as we read or hear the Gospel record, ensuring that we are truly coming to Him and not merely on a surface level as so many did.

22:24 *Teacher. Moses said*- Luke: "*Moses wrote* unto us". The Lord picks this up in His answer in :31: "Have you not read that which was *spoken* unto you by *God*". He is telling them that God and not Moses was the ultimate speaker to them; and that the word was not merely *written* but is a living word, actively *speaking* unto them. For all their much vaunted belief in Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, these men had failed to perceive that God was speaking to them personally through the human authors. And that criticism needs to be remembered today by those equally wedded to a declared belief in Divine inspiration of the Bible. It is to be to us a word *spoken* and not a dead letter written on paper.

That if a man dies having had no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up seed to his brother- The Lord could have replied that if they read the entire passage in Dt. 25:5-7, they would see that God actually made a concession in this matter; and the whole principle only applied to "brethren dwelling together". A man did not *have to* marry his brother's wife. In any case, as most adult men were married, it would have usually been a case of polygamy. But again, the Lord didn't point out that expositional error, but goes on to develop a far greater and higher principle concerning the nature of His Kingdom, in which such casuistry about marriage will be simply irrelevant. And again, He sets an example to those who have spent their religious lives arguing about divorce and remarriage and fellowship issues. Their arguments could be demonstrated

to be expositionally faulty. But the higher principle is that such issues shall be irrelevant in God's Kingdom; and we are to live the essence of the Kingdom life now as far as we can, in spirit at least. The Sadducees made a big deal of the fact that the word translated "raise up seed" is that used generally in the Septuagint for resurrection. Their idea was that resurrection is not of the body but through family life. To die childless was therefore tragic indeed. The same error is made by many today who effectively believe that family life is the ultimate form of spirituality. It is not, and God seeks to build a personal relationship with each of us, He is the personal God of Abraham, Isaac etc., and we shall experience a personal bodily resurrection at which we shall appear before God stripped of our family, and relate to Him as a single individual.

22:25 *Now there were with us seven brothers; and the first married and died having no seed, and thus left his wife to his brother*- This must have been a most unfortunate family. The Old Testament speaks of the failure to build up a house / family and the death of men in youth as being a curse from God for disobedience (Job 18:19; Ps. 107:38,39). Again, the Lord could have made capital of this- but He didn't. There was no element of personal attack, but rather an appeal to higher principle.

22:26 *In like manner the second also and the third, to the seventh*- As noted on :25, this was clearly not a true story.

22:27 *And after them all, the woman died*- She would have been judged to be a most unfortunate woman, likely under God's judgment (see on :25). But the Lord doesn't question the very unlikely story nor the contradictions within it- instead He works from what was presented to Him.

22:28 *In the resurrection therefore, whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her*- The other records add "When they shall rise from the dead". The Lord could've pointed out that they were well known for denying / speaking against the resurrection. But He doesn't make that obvious point, instead focusing on the higher principles rather than point scoring.

22:29 *But Jesus answered and said to them: You are mistaken*- The same word used by the Lord in describing how He as the good shepherd was searching for the sheep of Israel who had "gone astray" (18:12,13). Exactly because He was searching for them with a view to saving them, He did not indulge in point scoring or exposing the numerous errors in their claims. The fact the Lord even tried with these types is a huge inspiration to us all to never give up with any group of people.

As you neither know- Time and again the Lord assaults their pride in knowing the text of Scripture. "Have you *never* read" is commonly on His lips. We can read, and yet never really read; know, but never know.

Familiarity with Bible phrases is simply not the same as understanding them correctly.

The Scriptures, nor the power of God- The two are paralleled, with every relevance for the Sadducees who denied the Old Testament's inspiration apart from the Torah. Likewise in their audience the Lord pointed out that David in the Psalms spoke "in Spirit" (:43)- the Psalms were inspired as much as the Torah.

22:30 *For in the resurrection*- Why does the Lord speak of the Kingdom of God as "the resurrection"? Perhaps it is to pave the way for His teaching that "all live unto Him", in the sense that here He is likewise raising the idea that time will have a different dimension then. The joy and freshness of resurrection will last eternally. The Kingdom will be as it were an eternal moment of resurrection, an eternal now, with no fading thrill but an "everlasting joy upon [our] heads" that will not fade and morph with familiarity and the passage of time.

They neither marry nor are given in marriage- Note the present tenses. They are more striking in Lk. 20:36: "Neither *can they die*… they *are* equal unto the Angels: and *are* the children of God, being the children of the resurrection". Greek tenses, unlike Hebrew tenses, are precise. We would expect 'They shall not die… shall be equal… shall be…'. But the present tenses are striking. The Lord is building up to His point that the question about marriage is inappropriate because God is outside of our kind of time; He sees the believers in Him as even now immortal, a point made more strongly in John's Gospel. This is not the same as having an immortal soul, nor does it imply conscious survival of death. Rather is it a reflection of how God from His perspective outside of time sees His children. Jn. 3:3-5 makes the same point, that we are born again of water and spirit even in this life, and thereby are living the life eternal. But that is from God's standpoint outside of time as we experience it. Lk. 20:37 says that Moses "calls" [present tense] God "the God of Abraham…". Not only does this imply a living word which speaks to us today, but again the point is made throughout the passage that God is outside of time. This choice of tenses in this passage is purposeful, for elsewhere we read of how Moses said or commanded things in the past tense (e.g. Mt. 8:4 "things which Moses commanded", "Moses wrote", Lk. 20:28; "Moses gave you…", Jn. 6:32).

But are like the angels in heaven- The Sadducees denied their existence (Acts 23:8). The Lord's teaching that Angels do not marry was surely additionally an attack on the Jewish myths becoming popular at the time concerning the supposed marriage of Heavenly Angels with the daughters of men in Gen. 6. These myths are deconstructed in Jude and 2 Peter, but the Lord here is also correcting them. We marvel at how apparently 'off the cuff' He could speak in such a multi-faceted and profound way, addressing various issues simultaneously. Although His intellectual and

spiritual ability was doubtless capable of such instant responses, I prefer to imagine the Lord reflecting deeply upon God's word and preparing His ideas throughout the years of spiritual mindedness that preceded His ministry.

Lk. 20:36 adds that we shall be as "the children of God", thereby answering the Sadducees idea that it is a human duty to have children and thereby continue the race, for therein do we have our 'resurrection'. Again the Lord is lifting the whole question to a far higher level. Luke adds that the Lord first said that "the children of this world marry…". The Sadducees were assuming that the Kingdom of God would be a kind of continuation of this present life, just with eternity of nature. Whilst there are similarities and aspects of continuity between who we are and who we shall eternally be, we are mistaken in imagining the future Kingdom of God as some kind of ideal earthly situation, a tropical paradise holiday, which shall last eternally. This is the same mistake as thinking that we shall eternally be doing what "the children of *this* world" currently do. Instead of criticizing and exposing the faults in the argument presented, the Lord makes the point that the Kingdom of God will not be about marriage nor about casuistic arguments about the definition of marriage- the very arguments which have occupied the minds of far too many of His children. Paul uses the same logic in reasoning that arguments about food are irrelevant because the Kingdom of God will not be about such behaviour, but about love, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). Paul, like the Lord here, could have exposed the fallacies of exposition being engaged with, but instead reasons on a higher level- that seeing we shall not be arguing about such things eternally, let us not do it now.

22:31 *But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have you not read*- Of course they had, but the Lord is yet again making the point that we can read Scripture many times but not really read it as intended.

What was spoken to you by God, saying- Mk. 12:26 records the Lord saying: "…God spoke unto [Moses], saying". Surely the Lord said something like 'He spoke unto Moses, unto you, saying…'. What was spoken to Moses was spoken to them personally, just as the living word speaks to every generation. The Lord was equating each secular Jew with none less than Moses himself. This was unthinkable blasphemy in Judaistic thought, to see oneself as receiving God's words, having God reveal Himself directly to us, just as He did to Moses. God of course had wanted to reveal Himself like this to Israel, but they asked not to hear His voice directly, wanting Moses as a mediator. But the Lord says that now, through the medium of God's word, the voice of God comes directly to us too. In the new Israel and the new Judaism of the new covenant, in this sense we are each as Moses.

Luke adds: "That the dead are raised even Moses showed…". Sadducees believed only in Moses' writings, and denied the resurrection. The Lord

takes that position and runs with it, instead of trying to assert the inspiration of the rest of the Old Testament.

22:32 *I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?*- If the Lord was looking merely for a reference to God being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He had many places He could have quoted from. I suggest He chose Ex. 3:6 partly to show that the supremely intimate, personal revelation of God to Moses was just the same now to all individuals within Israel. It was a living word spoken to them personally. But also because the Lord wants to make the point that God is outside of time- and that passage goes on to climax in the revelation of that same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as the "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14). The God outside of time, witnessed by the way the tetragrammaton somehow straddles past, present and future tenses, therefore sees the dead as alive "unto Him". The question put to the Lord was very much rooted in the assumption that time as we now know it is going to continue in the Kingdom of God, and the Lord is making the point that this is an immature way of looking at it; and therefore the question was irrelevant. The Exodus 3 passage also contains repeated assurance that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will receive what God has promised- which requires bodily resurrection for them. We need to ever remember that the Lord was not merely demonstrating intellectual prowess in all this reasoning and allusion. He considered them as the sheep who erred / were astray, and through all His teaching here He was merely seeking to steer them to Him and ultimate salvation.

He is not the God of the dead but of the living- This Greek construction could mean 'Not only the God of the dead, but also of the living'. But the context is the Lord demonstrating that the understanding of the Sadducees was very much a dead religion and their God was effectively dead. They denied the resurrection and considered that we have reward only in this life. In this case, God was the God of Abraham only in the past. The Greek phrase could literally mean 'Not the God the dead, but the living [God]', alluding to the well known phrase "the living God". If God only acted for Abraham etc. in the past, then the God Abraham knew effectively died when Abraham died. But the living God seeks to impart life to the faithful.

Lk. 20:38 adds: "For all live unto Him". The Lord is critiquing their division between this life and the life to come- by saying that the faithful live on now in God's memory as they will eternally; He speaks of things which are not as though they are (Rom. 4:17), and in this sense whether we live or die we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8). Although the soul is mortal, the spirit returns to God and will be eternally "saved" at the last day. And the spirit refers to who a man essentially is, his thinking and character. This is preserved by God in His memory, and in that sense the faithful dead "live" before Him now. John's Gospel puts this in so many words by

saying that we can live the eternal life right now. Whilst bodily resurrection is so significant from our point of view, the God who is outside of our kind of time sees the dead as effectively living as He extends forwards into eternity from the present- in a way we cannot now do. I made the point above that recently the Lord had resurrected Lazarus, with the result that He appeared to have won over many who had previously supported the Jewish leadership. They were now trying to prove that resurrection doesn't happen. The Lord at that time had emphasized that the resurrection of Lazarus was a visual reminder of the new life which those who believed in Him could experience right now: "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn. 11:26). Luke's comment that "all live unto Him" is saying roughly the same thing. If our spirit is focused upon living and thinking the Kingdom life now, then this spirit is preserved by God upon death. And it is this which God sees after our death, and the sense in which we live unto Him.

22:33 *And when the crowds heard it*- Our debates with others are often not so much in order to convert them, but the listening audience and onlookers. And the Lord was ever aware of this. See on :42.

They were astonished at his teaching- Yet for all this, it was "the multitude" who were soon shouting for His blood. Mere intellectual persuasion of the truth of theology is no guarantee that a person is truly with the Lord.

22:34 *But when the Pharisees heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered together*- The idea could be that the Pharisees and Sadducees, traditionally opposed to each other, were united together in their desire to again try to entangle the Lord. This unity of opposed persons and groups against Christ is a theme of the records. Just as He unites people together around Him, so He unites people against Him- thus creating the Biblical picture of how we are either in God's people or in the group actively against them. This division will come to its final term in the latter day tribulation before the Lord's return.

22:35 *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, testing him*- Again we see the Lord's temptations being at the hand of the Jewish religious leaders, strengthening the case for thinking that the 'adversary' of the wilderness temptations was likewise somehow connected to the same group or thinking. *Peirazo* can mean both to test, and also to tempt to sin in a moral sense. If in the latter sense, we must ask in what the Lord was tempted to sin? Perhaps in exasperation, inappropriate anger, or to a giving up of effort with the Israel for whom He was dying.

22:36 *Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?*- It is often claimed that this means 'Which type of commandment?'. But the Lord's answer suggests that He saw it as meaning 'Which specific commandment'. Mk. 12:28 records them asking which is the greatest

commandment "of all", which requires that they wanted Him to name one specific one. Again, the Lord lifted the question to a higher level, quoting two commandments and speaking of them as one single commandment; and demonstrating that the unity of God is a command rather than a mere piece of fundamental but dead theology (see on :37).

22:37 *And he said to him: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*- Mk. 12:29 adds: "The Lord our God is one". That God is one is a command, an imperative to action. It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, thou shalt keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4 suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

22:38 *This is the great and first commandment*- They had asked which was the greatest commandment, but the Lord adds that this commandment is not only "great" but also "first", and we can understand that as meaning first in importance in our lives. He earlier had talked about seeking *first* [s.w.] God's Kingdom.

22:39 *And the second is like it*- The Lord is thus putting two commandments together to form one. Hence Mk. 12:31 records Him concluding, having quoted the two commandments: "There is none other commandment [singular] greater than these [plural]".

You shall love your neighbour as yourself- This is indeed a challenge; not only to love ourselves, but to relate to our neighbour as to ourselves. It suggests a unique unity between us and our neighbour within the Israel of God. That humanly impossible unity is only achievable by loving the one God. To love God and our brother is all part of the same thing. It is indivisible; the two commandments are in fact one commandment in practice. To claim to love God but not love or even be involved with our brother means, therefore, that we don't actually love God. John makes this explicit in 1 Jn. 4:1, and much of the Lord's teaching does likewise. Yet our tendency is to isolate them, claiming to love God whilst ignoring our brother, and maintaining a strong sense of separation from him.

22:40 *On these two commandments*- Again, the Lord makes the point. They wanted *one* commandment isolated as the greatest, and He gave them two, with the further comment that "all the law", all the others,

hung equally upon those two. The spiritual way of life is not a case of isolating one or two commandments and keeping them, but rather living a spirit of life and thinking. Loving God and our neighbour are seamlessly united, although so many try to do one without the other. On the one extreme is the person who sits at home in splendid isolation with their love for God, on the other is the person who thinks that love for neighbour- some neighbours, anyway- is quite enough, and needs no underpinning in a love for God, which involves keeping His commandments.

Hang the whole law and the prophets- The Lord surely had the Sadducees in view, with the differentiation they made between law and prophets. This would support the suggestion on :34 that they were somehow involved in this ongoing questioning. The achievement of love in practice between brethren, on the basis of their unity with each other elicited by their common connection to the one God, is what the entire Law was aiming at. The 613 commandments of Moses were not, therefore, to be seen as mere tests of obedience. They were designed to produce love and unity in practice.

22:41 *Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying*- The Lord had clearly done well in answering the questions, and it's easy to misinterpret this as Him now going onto the thrust of an offensive, having successfully parried the attacks. But remember His opening comment, that they 'erred' or were as sheep 'astray'. He was trying to steer them to Him, to repentance and salvation, and not to merely win an intellectual battle for its own sake. All the same, He capitalized upon their continued presence to seek to correct another major misunderstanding. His desire to save them is breathtaking. The fact there were Pharisees who later converted to Christ is proof enough that His strategy worked, at least for some (Acts 15:5). And remember that Saul the Pharisee was living in Jerusalem at the time, and may well have been listening carefully.

22:42 *What do you think of the Christ*- The use of *dokeo*, to seem or think, may be a hint that Matthew is here combating at least the incipient beginnings of Docetism, the idea that Christ only appeared to be whoever He was, a kind of Divine image cast upon the earth. This came to full term in the theology of the Trinity some time later.

Whose son is he? They said to him: The son of David- They were surely aware that Jesus was a son of David, on both the sides of Mary and Joseph. For they would've done their homework as to His [apparent] family of origin. See on 22:45 *How is He his son.*

Lk. 20:41 records that the Lord addressed a question to the wider audience: "How say they that Christ is David's son?". Having let the Pharisees give the answer, He then asks others how this can be the case.

Again, the Lord's dialogues with the Pharisees was not simply to try to convert them, but in order that the audience would learn. See on 22:33 *When the multitude heard this.* Mk. 12:37 concludes the section by observing that "the common people heard Him gladly", so again we see how the records seamlessly complement each other.

22:43 *He said to them: How then does David in the Spirit*- See on 22:29 *The Scriptures…*

Call him Lord- Judaism's concept of Messiah has always been vague and not commonly agreed, but there was and is the idea that the likes of Abraham, Moses and David are greater than Messiah. The Lord is pointing out that David considered Messiah to be his "Lord", just as Messiah was greater than Abraham (Jn. 8:58).

Saying- Another present tense, continuing the Lord's theme of God's word being a living word speaking to us today as if in an eternal present.

22:44 *The Lord said*- Clearly Yahweh. If the Divine Name was to be used in the New Testament, surely this would be the place for it. The fact it is not, when some Hebrew words are used (e.g. 'Sabaoth'), shows clearly enough that the literal usage of the tetragrammaton is not something God sees as important or even required.

To my Lord- Biblically and historically, David's immediate 'Lord' was Saul. Ps. 110 was originally a revelation to David of the potential possible for Saul, who was an anointed 'Messiah' figure. But Saul failed, and so the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to the Lord Jesus.

Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies underneath your feet- The Lord's enemies stood around Him as He applied this Psalm to Himself.

22:45 *If David then calls him Lord, how is he his son?*
- The "how" doesn't imply that David's Lord is not his son, but rather is a rhetorical question. How is the Messianic son of David, David's "Lord", to be his son or descendant? Mk. 12:37 says the Lord reinforced the question by asking "*From whence* is He his son?". The answer had to be: 'Through a woman in David's direct line giving birth to Him'. And the questioners were fully aware that Jesus was in the direct line of Mary (see on :42 *The Son of David*).

22:46 *And no one could say a word in reply. From that day nobody dared to ask him any other questions*- These very words are used of how the disciples after the resurrection dared not ask who Jesus was (Jn. 21:12), which is the very context here. The connection is clearly to show that they too through their being too influenced by Jewish thinking found

themselves in the same category as the unbelieving Jews- the difference being that they repented of it. Matthew was appealing to Jews to accept Jesus and repent of their wilful misunderstanding, and he and John are holding themselves up as a role model, just as we should in our appeals for repentance. The Greek for “questions” isn’t in the original; they dared not ask Him again. The implication from the context could be that they dared not ask Him ‘Who are You?’, for the answer was clear in their consciences. They knew, on one level, that He was Messiah, that He was the heir to the vineyard, whom they knowingly sought to murder.

CHAPTER 23

23:1 *Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples, saying*- The chapter is clearly in three parts. Verses 1-12 are spoken to the disciples and the crowds; then there are the seven woes against the Pharisees (:13-33), and finally a statement of the Lord's love toward Israel and the inevitable judgment of Jerusalem. The Lord's interchanges with the Sadducees and Pharisees in chapter 22 had been in the presence of the crowds, and He had thrown at least one question to them. Clearly He was seeking to use those dialogues to appeal to the watching audience. So often this is what happens in preaching work. It is those who are observing who are persuaded, rather than the protagonists of the discussion. The Lord realized this, and now consciously appeals to those onlookers.

23:2 *The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses seat*- This appears to some to be a past tense: They sat themselves in Moses' seat, the place from where Moses taught [Jewish teachers sat to teach], i.e. they had in the past appropriated to themselves the authority or seat of Moses. This retranslation avoids the apparent difficulty of the Lord otherwise claiming that they had equal authority to Moses. In this case, His command "That observe and do" (:3) would need to be rendered as His observation rather than His command- 'Whatever they tell you to do, that you observe and do'. But it is also possible to understand the Lord to be teaching submission, for the moment, to the religious leaders- rather than rank revolution against them. For the time to rise up in literal protest was still not yet, rather does the Lord's teaching urge that the revolt He has in mind is purely internal, deep within the human heart and psyche. By bidding obedience to those men, He would have been appealing to Dt. 17:11: "And you shall observe to do according to all that they (the religious leaders) shall teach you".

23:3 *Therefore*- Because they were in the place of Moses, the Lord advised obedience to them rather than quitting the synagogue system. He told His disciples that the time would come when they would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2). He clearly had no conception of guilt by association, acquired through religious association with those who taught and lived wrongly. For He goes on to roundly condemn the whole system of Judaism. Perhaps He hoped that the presence of His people amongst that system would be an influence for good upon at least some and a witness to the leadership. Or perhaps He knew that until the more public founding of the Christian church, those people had no realistic alternative but to continue attendance. For outside of the religious system they would spiritually flounder. Whatever, we never hear Him making a direct command to come out from the system until in Revelation we hear His call to come out of the latter day Babylon, which was likely an extension

of His teaching in the Olivet prophecy to leave Jerusalem when she was besieged in the very last days. But this was therefore more of a call to self preservation rather than of religious separation because of differing principles. If He had intended separation for religious reasons, He surely would have called for it earlier. But He doesn't. The essential witness is made from our position embedded, at least externally, in this world.

Put together two scriptures in your mind: "You must obey [the Pharisees] and do everything they tell you"; and, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees" (Mt. 23:3; 16:6). Surely the Lord is teaching that we should respect elders but never cease personally analysing what they teach for ourselves. Once we stop doing this, we start resigning our own personality and will be unable to follow our Lord personally, i.e. with our own persons. And then we will be ripe for being caused to stumble, if those elders we are listening to then offend us. For 'we', with all that we are, will have been dominated by them.

All things whatever they tell you, do and observe- But soon the Lord would be sending the disciples out with the commission to teach the world "to observe [s.w.] all things that I have commanded you" (28:20). And this command became programmatic for the early church, whose integrity was to be judged on the degree to which they had kept / observed [s.w.] the Lord's commands (1 Jn. 2:3-5; 3:22,24; 5:2,3; there are other allusions to the great commission in John's letters, e.g. 3 Jn. 7). So clearly enough *His* commands and the need for loyalty to *them* soon replaced His word here in Mt. 23:3 about observing / keeping the commands of the Scribes. He may be employing an element of sarcasm, as if to say 'It's OK, you don't have to put up with this much longer; in a day's time, I shall be dead, the Law of Moses will be completed, you will be free. But for just another 24 hours, endure their tyranny'. Only afterwards would the disciples have appreciated what the Lord meant.

But do not you copy their works, for they say and do not- The Lord is making a purposeful paradox. Their 'works' were a not doing or working. Their sins of omission were counted by Him as a work. They, of course, prided themselves upon their works. But the Lord is saying that they actually did nothing- in His book. In this lies the tragedy of Christianity as mere religion. The works can be done, and yet in the Lord's eyes, the essential works are not done. The Lord continues His play on this idea by going on to say that the works they do are done to be seen of men (:5). They did the works but because they were done towards men and not to God, they were not really done. If we have our reward of men, then we have no reward of God. Our works [s.w.] must be made manifest / revealed by the light of Christ, specifically in the cross, as to whether they are worked "in God" or not (Jn. 3:21). The mere doing of the work is not the basis of acceptability.

The Pharisees did all the works, but in their hearts they never knew God, and finally went and did His Son to death. The Lord plays on the fact that ultimately, in God's eyes, they did no works at all: "Do not ye after their works; for they say, and *do* not" (Mt. 23:3). We are left to imagine the anger of those zealous men. They *did* do works, as the Lord observed. But to Him, ultimately they did nothing at all. They had no genuine motives.

23:4- see on 23:25.
Yes, they bind heavy burdens- John appears to allude to this in saying that the true commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3, s.w. "heavy"). The fences created by men around God's law are in fact higher than the actual Divine law. God's laws have a creative intention, whereas human fences around them are totally negative in their intention. The Lord uses the same word later in the discourse, in stating that the 'heavier' matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith (:23). Yet even those things are not "heavy" (1 Jn. 5:3) in the sense that the regulations of the Pharisees were. The Lord's burden is light compared with the weight of carrying unforgiven sin (11:30). The parallel between sin and heavy burdens is also found in David's comment about carrying the weight of his unforgiven sin with Bathsheba (Ps. 38:4). The burden of sin was thus tied upon people by giving them religious rules which they were unable to keep due to human weakness, and because sin is partly a matter of conscience, it was still counted to the people as sin if they broke it. Therefore to enforce such rules upon people was effectively lading them with sin. This principle needs to be considered by those who 'bind' isolation from other brethren upon believers, or who 'bind' them to a single life after divorce.

Hard to be carried- AV. The Lord sensitively commented that He had many things to command His disciples, "but you cannot bear / carry [s.w.] them at this time" (Jn. 16:12). In teaching others God's requirements, we must be sensitive to human weakness, rather than present them with a whole set of Divine standards as a package and demand their immediate acceptance of it. The Lord still accepted the disciples, even though He had not asked them to do all the things He would like to have asked them to do. And there are likewise levels of discipleship for us too. The same word is also used about carrying the cross of Jesus (Lk. 14:27; Jn. 19:17). This is the ultimately hard to be carried burden. If people have signed up to carry this, who are we to seek to add to it by our demands upon them. James surely had the Lord's teaching here in mind when he reasoned that neither the disciples nor the Jewish fathers had been able to carry the yoke of the Mosaic law (Acts 15:10). Any teaching that the Mosaic law must be obeyed [and there are plenty of Christians teaching this, sadly] is therefore seeking to bind a heavy burden upon men which will lead to their spiritual collapse and thereby to our own condemnation.

And lay them- The same word used about the cross being laid upon the Lord (Lk. 23:26), and the laying of the lost sheep on the shoulders of the shepherd (Lk. 15:5). As this is the Lord's only other reference to anything being laid upon the shoulders, we may be intended to understand that carrying the weight of the lost, seeking to save them, can be replaced by carrying the weight of worrying about obeying human regulations. So many spiritual lives and so much endeavour goes into keeping in with a social club based around the laws of men, when that energy could be far better used carrying the lost to salvation.

On men's shoulders- The laying of an unbearable weight upon the shoulders recalls exactly the language of the cross of Christ being laid upon Him. Instead of men carrying *this* burden, they can instead end up carrying the burden of obedience to human regulations. The focus changes to obeying human expectation rather than the effort involved in engaging with the crucified Christ. All such human laws, regarding fellowship practice, dress codes etc., are therefore likely to make men stumble and thereby bring condemnation to those who demand them. Legalism and human religion are a burden laid on men's shoulders. But the cross of Jesus is also a burden laid upon our shoulders (Mt. 23:4). The greatness of the demands of the cross free us from the burdens of man's legalism. But it's still a choice, between a cross and a cross. See on 3:11. As Moses "looked on their burdens" at age 40 (Ex. 2:11), so at the start of His ministry, our Lord assessed the weight of ours. His concern for our burdens in Mt. 11:30; 23:4 is perhaps a conscious allusion back to Moses' awareness of Israel's burdens, and his desire to deliver them, even though it cost him all that he had in this world.

But they will not move them- Gk. 'remove' them. In His earlier teaching about this in Lk. 11:46, the Lord said they would not "touch" the burdens. The Lord by contrast used touch frequently in order to connect with sinful people and their conditions, and to thereby heal them. The Pharisees would not touch them for fear of contamination; they would not associate or engage with sinful people and the results of their sins. The Lord used His fingers to enter the ears of the deaf and touch the eyes of the blind, secreting unclean body fluid. This is the way to remove burdens- to engage with them. And yet closed table policies effectively do the same, by refusing association with those judged by latter day Pharisees to be too serious sinners. The fear of guilt by association is utterly selfish, and results in the burdens never being removed or made lighter for the person struggling to carry them.

With their finger- The contrast is between the weight of the burdens on the shoulders of men, so great it crushed them; and the ease with which the law-makers could remove them with their fingers, perhaps referring to their ability to write things with a few strokes of the fingers which would remove those burdens. This is ever more true today- a few taps

with a finger on a keyboard to change traditional demands on fellow believers, and burdens can be removed.

23:5 *But they do all their works*- See on :3 *Their works… they do not*.

To be seen by men- The same Greek word and teaching as in 6:1; the Pharisees did good deeds "to be seen of men" and therefore have no reward. But the warning of 6:1 is to us all. Too easily we can feel that these woes against the Pharisees are not relevant to us, but they were merely giving in to the same tendencies as are common to us all. John's Gospel uses the same word for 'seeing' with regard to our 'seeing' Jesus in the sense of believing in Him. So the contrast is between those who look to Jesus, and those who want others to look to them. Widening and enlarging the religious symbols on their clothing was exactly in order to be seen by men. Our focus upon looking toward Jesus will make us less interested in how men look upon us.

For they make their phylacteries wide- Nearly all the descriptions here of what the Pharisees did are couched in language which is elsewhere used about spiritual things. The point being made is that they were living a religious life which was an inversion of what true spirituality, and especially the example of the Lord Jesus, are all about. The reason why so much attention is given to the Pharisees in the Gospel records is surely because their mentality is so typically human, and their failure is preserved as a warning to all who claim to be committed to the same God of Israel. The Greek word translated "enlarge" is elsewhere nearly always used about the need to "magnify" *God* rather than ourselves (Lk. 1:46 "My soul *magnifies* the Lord"; Acts 10:46; 19:17; Phil. 1:20).

And the tassels on their garments long- The same word translated "hem" is used elsewhere only about the hem of the Lord's garment which gave blessing and healing to others (9:20; 14:36).

23:6 *And they love the chief place at feasts*- The Lord had earlier used the very same words to describe how the attitude to places at feasts was directly relevant to placing at the Messianic banquet of the Kingdom. Those who now take the lowest places around the Lord's table will be exalted, and those who took the high places will be demoted in "shame", a term usually associated with rejection and condemnation (Lk. 14:7,8). Those who consider themselves as spiritually superior in the ecclesia will be demoted and that demotion may well be in terms of condemnation. Our attitude around the Lord's table now will be directly relevant to our placement at the Lord's table when He returns. Those who have taken for themselves the more glorious places will be rejected- that is the clear message.

And the chief seats in the synagogues- They wanted to be publicly seen as spiritually superior. The whole structure of church life, whereby some must have public roles, is such that people can fall so easily into a love of publicity. The Lord realizes this, and often removes His beloved from such temptations. This explains the otherwise inexplicable way in which the Lord allows some of His most talented and capable servants to be removed from the public eye to serve Him in human obscurity.

Note that the Lord here is repeating almost word for word what He has previously said about the Pharisees in Luke 11. To repeat so much text twice in the Gospel records, and for the Lord to give identical word-for-word teaching on two occasions, shows how important these warnings are for all readers. This consideration alone suggests that we each have the same tendency as the Pharisees; they are but epitomes of our own deepest tendencies and desires.

23:7 *And the salutations in the marketplaces*- The Lord's reason for going to the market was to invite men to work in the vineyard and receive the penny of salvation (20:3); and His people sitting in the markets sought to persuade others of the need to respond to the Gospel (11:16). The Pharisees went to the markets to simply flaunt their external spirituality. Again, note how their behaviour was the very inversion of true spirituality.

And to be called of men, Rabbi- This uses *kaleo,* the standard word translated 'call'. The Lord and His followers *call men* to the Kingdom from the markets (25:14; Lk. 14:16); rather than going to the markets to be *called something by men*. Again we see how the Pharisees' behaviour was a parody of true spirituality.

23:8 *But you are not to be called Rabbi*- The Lord was looking ahead to when those immature disciples would be the leaders of the new community He believed He was creating. He foresaw the day would come when their converts would naturally want to show them respect, and He warns against the use of titles as a sign of respect. But in this kind of thinking ahead, we have an insight into the great faith and hope the Lord had in His men; for they were so immature, and so far away from such positions of authority and leadership. But He has the same hopes for us too. His positivity is and was extraordinary. The whole vision was a huge challenge for the disciples- to learn that they would one day be the equivalent of the Rabbis in the new Israel the Lord was creating.

For one is your teacher- AV "Master". 'Rabbi' means 'master' and is from the Hebrew word *ab*, 'father'. This explains why having taught against using the title 'Rabbi', the Lord now speaks specifically about 'master' and 'father'. The greatness of Christ means that once it is perceived, then we will naturally perceive that in the light of His excellence, we have no pre-eminence over each other; we are brethren, in Christ.

And all you are brothers- Just because we are all brothers, actually something *more than physical brothers and sisters*, we are not to call any of us 'Master', because if we do, it will distract us from our personal looking to Jesus as Lord and Master. This is why anything that even suggests a personality cult built around leading brethren, no matter how wonderful they are or were, really must be avoided. For it takes us away from the one and only Lord and Master. Whatever leaders or organisers we have, we are to call nobody our 'father' in a spiritual sense. The wonder of our relationship with *the* Father ought to mean that we never do this. Above all, we are all brethren in Christ. John refers to himself as the brother of the congregation (Rev. 1:9), and the leading apostles were addressed as 'brother' just as much as anyone else in the ecclesia (Acts 21:20; 2 Pet. 3:15). There may be leaders among brothers (Acts 15:22), but we are still essentially brethren. The intimate inter-connectedness of the family must ever remain; which explains why Paul is called 'Paul' and not a longer form of address. Likewise I'd suggest that the practice of calling each other by our first names, with the prefix 'brother' or 'sister', is healthy; and, indeed, a privilege. Reference to a brother as 'Dr.' or 'Mr.' seems to me to be quite at variance with the family nature of our relationship. If the Lordship of Jesus is fully felt as it should be, then even those who become leaders in the congregation [the disciples, in the first instance] are to feel themselves as brethren with those they are leading. This brotherhood between leaders and followers is essential for true functioning of the body of Christ.

23:9 *And call no one on the earth your father-* Although the twelve called Jesus 'Rabbi', they perhaps didn't respect Him initially as the *only* Rabbi - because the disciples were too influenced by Judaism. The Lord has to remind the disciples to call no man their rabbi or 'father' on earth, i.e. in the land, of Israel. The disciples were evidently still under the influence of Judaism and the religious world around them, and this background died hard for them. "Why say the scribes…?", they reasoned (Mk. 9:11), implying that their view was of at least equal if not greater weight when compared with that of the Lord Jesus [as they also did in Mt. 17:9,10]. He had to specifically warn them against the Scribes in Lk. 20:45,46. 'Father' was a common title for the rabbis, who referred to their disciples as their 'sons'. The disciples clearly respected the apostate rabbis far more than He wanted them to. We can easily overlook the deep and awesome significance of calling our fellow believers "brother" and "sister". As Paul so strongly stresses, the Lord Jesus created a new sense of family, of "social identity". We can easily miss how radical this was in first century Palestine; just as we can miss it in our own context. In the Mediterranean world of the first century, families were supremely important. The head of the family exercised total control. For the Lord to teach that His followers should call no man on earth their father was extreme; and yet He said it and expected it (Mt. 23:9).

For one is your Father- This appeal to the unity of God would've sat well with the Jewish audience. But like many who profess faith in the One God, they hadn't thought through the implications. If God alone and uniquely is our Father, then we are not to call men 'Rabbi', rooted as the word was in the Hebrew word *ab*, 'father'.

He who is in Heaven- If there is a Father in Heaven, we don't need a spiritual father upon earth. The implication is that they considered that although indeed there was one Father in Heaven, Heaven is distant and we need a father on earth. The Lord is implying that the King-dom, the rulership and essence of God in Heaven, is to be seen and felt on earth in our lives.

23:10 *Neither be called*- The Lord has warned His people not to call their spiritual leaders by titles such as father or master, and now He addresses those who would become leaders, the nervous and wavering disciples, and urges them not to allow others to call them by these titles. Again, He foresaw how those weak men would soon be in a position where others would wish to give them these titles, and in so doing we have a window upon His hopefulness and vision, at a time when the material in His hands seemed so weak and immature.

Masters- The root word is used about leaders in the church: "Them which *have the rule over* you" (Heb. 13:7,17,24); "He *that is chief*" amongst the believers should be as the servant (Lk. 22:26); Paul was "the *chief* speaker" (Acts 14:17), Barnabas and Silas were "*chief men* amongst the brethren" (Acts 15:22). So the Lord is not teaching that there are not to be leaders; it is practically impossible in any case to have any community wherein all are identical and without leadership. But the Lord's point is that those in such positions should not be named as such, and should stop others calling them by such names. All in the community of faith should perceive Christ as the one ultimate Lord and Master, and in the light of that deep sense, all should see themselves as brethren on the same ultimate level with each other. One of the key factors in the apostasy of the early church was a failure to give due weight to the Lord's teaching here.

For one is your master, the Christ- Perhaps this was added by Matthew in brackets, as it were, seeing that the Lord never baldly calls Himself "the Christ" in so many words.

23:11 *But he that is greatest*- The Lord spoke distinctly in the singular. Not 'Those who are the great ones', but the specific individual who is the greatest. Surely He had Himself in view.

Among you- Again, this is distinctly relevant to the Lord Jesus personally. He was soon to repeat these words with specific reference to Himself: "He that is greatest among you... He that is chief, as He that serves... I am *among you* as He that serves" (Lk. 22:26,27). The idea of "among you" is an oblique reference to His humanity, as one of us.

Shall be your servant- The servant of Israel was the subject of Isaiah's servant songs, which came to their climax in the Lord's death upon the cross, prefigured by His washing the disciples' feet half naked as a servant, dressed as He would be at the time of His final death on the cross.

23:12 *And whosoever*- The singular "greatest" person in view in :11 was the Lord Jesus; He was speaking of Himself, and in a sense speaking obliquely to Himself as well as to His immediate audience. But He now teaches that all in Him must pass through the same path of humiliation and exaltation. The same words for 'abase' and 'exalt' are used about all believers, e.g. "Humble yourselves [s.w. 'abase'] in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up [s.w. "exalt"]" (James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). The Lord gave a parabolic example of what He meant when He also used the same words together about how the proud Pharisee would be "abased" and the convicted sinner 'humbled himself' and would later be 'exalted' (Lk. 18:14). The Lord's path of humiliation and exaltation is therefore to be that of us all; and Phil. 2:4-12 clearly applies this to His whole life and supremely to His death on the cross and exaltation subsequently. "He *humbled Himself* (s.w. 'humble' and 'abase' here in Mt. 23:12)… unto death" (Phil. 2:8). He there is therefore no longer a mere historical event, but rather a living pattern with which we engage throughout the progressive humiliation which the Lord's hand brings upon us, so that we might be exalted in due time. This, in one sense, is what the paths of our lives are all about- progressive humiliation under His mighty hand, both pushing ourselves down and being pushed down.

Shall exalt himself- Again relevant to the Lord Jesus, who was highly exalted because of His servanthood. But He was exalted by God, not Himself (Acts 2:33; 5:31 s.w.). And the very same word is used of the Lord's lifting up on the cross (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32,34). This was the true exaltation.

Shall be humbled- This is the very same word used in the next clause: "He that shall humble [s.w. 'abase'] himself…". In the end, we are brought down. We are humbled by our own humanity and weakness. We either bring ourselves down, or God will bring us down. So we may as well humble ourselves so that we shall be exalted by God, rather than exalting ourselves so that God will eternally bring us down in

condemnation at the last day. It's humility, bringing down, either way. So certain is the connection between humility and exaltation that James 1:9 can say that the brother who is 'abased' (AV "of low degree") *is* exalted- in the eyes of the God who sees outside of our time, for whom all live unto Him even now.

And whoever shall humble himself shall be exalted- God recognized Mary's "low estate" [humility] and exalted her above all women (Lk. 1:48), just as He would exalt His Son among men. The same Greek word is used in Acts 8:33: "In his humiliation ['low estate'] his judgment was taken away". It occurs too in Phil. 2:8: "He *humbled himself*". In the cross, indeed throughout the seven stage self-humiliation of the Lord which Phil. 2 speaks of, He was living out the spirit of his mother. She taught him the life and the way of the cross. Hence the way she insisted on being there at the end, and the comfort she would have given Him, and the love He showed by asking for the only one who really understood Him to be taken away, for her sake as well as His own. The Lord directly alluded to His mother's pattern of humiliation and exaltation by using the same word again here in Mt. 23:12: "Whosever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself [s.w. be abased- we must either humble ourselves or be humbled, it's such a powerful logic] shall be exalted". Thus Jesus alludes to His mother's words in order to set her up as our pattern ["whosoever"]. And yet He Himself showed the ultimate obedience to her pattern in the death of the cross. For this and many other reasons, the Lord's mind was upon His mother in His time of dying. And according to the Messianic Psalms, He even asks God to have mercy upon Him *for Mary's sake* (Ps. 86:16; 116:16).

23:13 *But woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites!*- The Lord now utters seven woes, just as Isaiah had uttered seven woes after telling Judah the parable of the vineyard (Is. 5:8-6:5)- which the Lord had also recently done. Isaiah's woes were likewise uttered as a reflection of genuine Divine anger, but they were also a last ditch appeal to the Judah of Hezekiah's time to repent, lest the Assyrian invasion come and destroy them. Isaiah's woes largely concerned the extremely fleshly behaviour of Judah at his time; the Lord's woes concern religious hypocrisy of the apparently zealous, Torah-obedient Jews. The point is that religious hypocrisy, even if it involves careful obedience to some Divine principles, is just as wanton and fleshly as drunkenness and theft, the kinds of things criticized in Isaiah's seven woes.
You lock up- The same figure of the door of the Kingdom being shut [but by the Lord, not men] is found in 25:10. The similarity is such that we may be intended to understand the foolish virgins are those who were locked out of the Kingdom because of the Pharisees. Their lack of oil, of personal spirituality, was because their religious leaders had not

inculcated this in them, nor any sense of their own fallibility and frailty- in that the reason they ended up locked out of the Kingdom was because they had not considered that their oil would likely fail. The Pharisees had "the key of knowledge" (Lk. 11:52) in a spiritually ignorant and illiterate society which depended upon them for knowledge of God's word. Likewise if the elders / judges of Israel had been wise, the entire people would have entered the land (Dt. 16:20). The whole of Israel would've stayed in the wilderness and not entered the Kingdom / land if Gad and Reuben hadn't initially gone over Jordan (Num. 32:15). Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren't encamped around the tabernacle (Num. 1:53). We really can cause others to not enter God's Kingdom by limiting their access to God's word [a sin of omission], or by making demands on them in the name of His Kingdom which are too heavy for them to bear [a sin of commission]. This imparts an urgency and eternal importance to all our interactions with others. No longer can we see the community of believers as a mere social club, nor the world around us as simply the dead furniture of our lives. We have their salvation or stumbling away from it within our power. This fact also denies us from assuming that whether we fail or not in our interactions with others, God will somehow make good our failures and save others anyway. He has delegated His work into our hands, and to some extent the degree to which it prospers or fails is our responsibility. Otherwise the whole language of delegation of His wealth into our hands is somehow meaningless.

You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves- As if they slammed the door in the face of ones eager to enter the Kingdom. If we believe that we ourselves will be there, we will spark off an upward spiral of positive thinking in the community of believers with whom we are associated. Think carefully on the Lord's words to the Pharisees: "For ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Mt. 23:13). If we don't believe we will be there, we end up discouraging others.

Nor allow those who would enter to go in- The Greek *aphiemi* translated "allow" more commonly carries the idea of loosing, setting free, and is translated 'forgive'. There may be a hint here at what the Lord also taught in chapter 18- that unforgiveness of others makes them stumble from entering the Kingdom. And the Pharisees with their endless demands upon men were indeed unforgiving. There is a sense in which we will enter the Kingdom at the last day (5:20; "Not every one that says Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom", 7:21; 18:3; 25:10 s.w.), and yet in another sense we are entering now through the gates ("enter in at the narrow gate", 7:13; 19:17,24). Our lives now are on a path, a journey, which is entering the Kingdom. The significance of life and living could not be more intense.

Earlier when speaking these words, the Lord had said that the lawyers were 'hindering' those who were in the process of entering the Kingdom (Lk. 11:52). The same word is used about how the disciples 'forbad' children to come to Jesus (19:14) and about 'forbidding' baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is exactly how people can be hindered or not 'allowed' to enter the Kingdom today- by refusing them baptism because of some inadequacy of knowledge or behaviour, or because they are simply felt to be in a category [like "children" were by the disciples] who are inappropriate for the Kingdom. These reflections make us realize that the Pharisees were not a mere phenomenon in history, but have their direct equivalents today.

23:14 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites!*- They were totally fleshly people on the inside, but their acting involved the "pretence", the *prophasis* or actor's cloak, of making long prayers, appearing righteous on the outside. The Lord homes in upon such behaviour in the Sermon on the Mount- appearing to be spiritual when we are not is deeply angering to the Lord.

For you devour widow's houses- I mentioned earlier that the language used here about the behaviour of the Scribes and Pharisees is elsewhere used about the righteous behaviour of the Lord and His followers; the Jewish leaders were living a religious life, but it was but a parody of true spirituality. The same words for "devour" and "house" are used of how the Lord Jesus was 'eaten up' or 'devoured' with zeal for His Father's "house". But by contrast the Scribes thought only of how they could devour the houses of widows, scheming how to get the house of a vulnerable single old woman left to them, and how they could devour that wealth upon themselves. We note that Mark and Luke conclude this section with the account of the widow who gave her entire wealth to the temple coffers (Mk. 12:42; Lk. 21:1). This was surely to add assurance that although her donation was misused, it was carefully noted by God to her eternal credit.

While for a pretence you make long prayers- See on *Hypocrites*. The word was used about an actor's cloak, and thus connects with the theatrical term 'hypocrites', play-actors. The Lord uses the same word in Jn. 15:22: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no *cloak* for their sin". When did He come and speak unto the Jews about their hypocrisy? Surely here in Matthew 22. Although they did have a cloak for their sin before men, the Lord is saying in John 15 that they have no such cloak before Him.

Therefore you shall receive greater condemnation- There will be degrees of punishment, although it will be self-inflicted.

23:15- see on 17:12.
Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you compass sea and land to make one proselyte- Periago ("compass") is only elsewhere used in the Gospels of the Lord 'walking around' the villages around the sea of Galilee (4:23; 9:35). Again, their behaviour was a conscious inversion of His.

And when he has become so, you make him twofold more a son of Gehenna than yourselves- The condemnation of anyone is partly their fault, and partly the fault of others. They stopped people entering the Kingdom (:13) and thus made them inherit condemnation. This is the danger of legalism. Despite such huge missionary efforts and apparent devotion, imposing legalism upon others leads to their condemnation and the worse woe, therefore, upon the missionary. They made the person be condemned in that they had made him a proselyte. The same Greek word is used both times for "made". By becoming a proselyte, the person became responsible to judgment and would be condemned. Here is proof enough that knowledge makes responsible to judgment. The Jews didn't give men the good news of Christ and God's grace; rather they gave only partial knowledge of the whole picture, of God's demands upon men. They persuaded men to enter covenant relationship with Him, undertaking to keep His commandments, whilst not explaining grace and the love of God. And thereby they made those people condemned. This is just as easily done today in the preaching of a one-sided message which lacks any real Gospel, or good news of salvation by faith and grace.

In "twofold more" we again see the idea of degrees of punishment. The Lord has just said that the Pharisees would have greater condemnation than others (:14), and now He says that their converts would have double even that. Perhaps the implication of that is that these proselytes were not mere passive converts, but were inspired by the example of their teachers to be even more extreme in their legalism and lack of true faith. A case could be made that the Hellenistic Jews who persecuted Paul so fiercely were in fact Gentile proselytes. Reflect too how Saul was more obsessed against Christians than his teacher, the Pharisee Gamaliel. This is all so true to human observation, that the converts of legalists become typically even more fanatic than their spiritual fathers.

23:16 *Woe to you, you blind guides, who say: Whoever swears by the temple*- Their blindness was a major source of criticism (:16,17,24,26).

Paul uses the language of blind guides of the blind to the Jewish Christian believers in Rom. 2:19- showing again that the mentality of the Pharisees is likely to be a problem for us all; we are failing to get the point if we read these woes upon them and feel somehow isolated from those men by time and culture. Their blindness was self-inflicted, otherwise it would not have been cause for rebuke. If someone doesn't want to see God's ways, then they never can see them, because the darkness in which they have chosen to mentally move has blinded them. This is true for those who do not live in love (1 Jn. 2:9,11), homosexual sinners who go so far in their perversion that they conclude they were born gay [blindness indeed], and those who are blind to God's existence [because they have chosen such darkness].

It is nothing- They were saying that an oath could be taken but breaking it was no problem if one 'only' swore by the temple. Jews swore by the temple because of their belief at the time that the temple was eternal. Because they broke their oaths and considered the temple to effectively be dispensable, therefore the Lord goes on in chapter 24 to predict the destruction of the temple.

But whoever swears by the gold of the temple- On the basis that that men swore by the greatest thing they could (Heb. 6:13,16), we have here an insight into their mind. For them, gold was paramount, for they were materialistic (Lk. 16:14). And it was even more important than the temple and the God who dwelt there.

He is bound by his oath- This suggests that some oaths were binding and others were not. And thus a scale of honesty was created, whereby human words themselves were not significant, but were only given value according to how much they were underpinned by oaths. The Lord therefore taught that all such swearing was to be outlawed for His people (5:34-36). The word *opheilo* is used often in the Gospels but always in the context of the debt owed to God for human sin (18:28,34; Lk. 7:41; 16:7; 17:10), and the debt of others to us for their sin against us (18:30; Lk. 11:4). Instead of judging to what degree others are bound / obligated to us for their sins, we are to frankly forgive, just as God frankly forgives our debts.

23:17 *You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold, or the temple*- The idea was that men swore by the greatest thing they could, which means that if they are going to swear at all, they should swear by God (Heb. 6:13,16). However, Jews didn't like to swear by God, and so they had a whole range of things by which they swore- despite the fact that Dt. 6:13 clearly stated "You shall fear Yahweh… and shall swear by His Name". An oath by the temple was "nothing", but by the gold of the temple was even more. They were thereby effectively introducing a whole range of possible

levels of honesty. Which the Lord had cut right through by insisting that our yes must be yes, without any oaths (5:34-36). James alludes to this by saying that "Above all things… swear not" (James 5:12). The importance of absolute truthfulness and not grading the honesty of our words is so important that James urges us to this "above all things". Truthfulness with God, with others and within ourselves, is paramount. It is a reflection of our experience of God's total and genuine forgiveness of us. In the forgiveness context, this spirit of truthfulness is what allows us to genuinely, from the heart forgive others not in word only but in feeling and reality.

That has made the gold sacred?- By so saying, the Lord reduced 'gold' to a mere metal of no intrinsic holiness outside the context of God's service. The Pharisees, as many believers today, had isolated aspects of their religion and glorified them in themselves, forgetting the wider context. Thus it may be that a sister focuses on one particular aspect of service until it is out of all context, a brother may obsess about a specific Bible teaching out of all perspective with the rest of God's revelation and intentions. But it's doubtful that the temple of itself sanctified the gold within it- that isn't a Biblical idea. See on :19 *The altar that sanctifies the gift*.

23:18 *And, Whoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing!*- Their desire to define everything led them to downplay the significance of the altar because they were so concerned with the value of the sacrifice placed upon it. And yet Ex. 29:37 pronounced the altar to also be holy. Their penchant for definition led them to ignore the clearest statements in the Law they claimed to read, study and love to obey. Having spoken three times in the same section about "the altar" and "the temple", it cannot be incidental that the Lord goes on to say that they had effectively slain Zacharias "between the temple and the altar" (:35). He is demonstrating that despite their hypersensitive interpretation of these things, they had committed sacrilege in those very places.

But whoever shall swear by the gift that is upon it, he is bound by his oath- Again we have an insight into how the Pharisees thought. Gifts to the temple were all important to them, because those gifts were effectively their income.

23:19 *You blind men! For which is greater: the gift*- The fact the Lord rebukes them for their blindness shows that blindness is in this sense their choice. I would suggest that much erroneous understanding is a result of people choosing not to understand, rather than having some genuinely excusable intellectual blockage.

Or the altar that makes the gift sacred?- The Lord had earlier taught that a gift brought to the altar was unacceptable if the offerer was not first reconciled to his brother (5:23,24). But as so often, He uses their reasoning and for a moment, argues as if it were true. If they considered that the altar sanctified the gift, then effectively there was a unity between the sacrifice and the altar. To draw a distinction between oaths made by the altar and those made by the sacrifice upon it was therefore utterly a false distinction. The Lord could have argued that oaths should only be made by God, in line with Dt. 6:13. Or He could have reiterated His position that our yes should mean yes, and therefore there was no need for any swearing by anything (5:34-36). But we note *how* He argues here- He uses their wrong ideas and works with them to demonstrate ultimately how they were misplaced and wrong. He does the same in using the language of demons. Instead of a bald declaration of truth, He worked with people from where they were. Far too often, bald declarations of truth are presented in a way which can only alienate, and is more for the benefit of the speaker than the audience. It all comes down to whether we genuinely wish to lead a person onwards, for their benefit; or whether we are involved in the whole interchange for our own self-justification and benefit.

23:20 *He therefore that swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it*- The Lord is criticizing the distinction made by the Jews between swearing by the altar, and swearing by the sacrifice; or swearing by the temple, and swearing by the gold placed in the temple treasury. If a man swore by the temple or by the altar, those things could not be taken up if he was found to be telling untruth. But if he swore by the sacrifice or donation of gold he had made, those things could be seized.

23:21 *And he that swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him*- The Lord's point here and in :22 was that effectively, the Pharisees were doing what they were trying hard not to do, i.e. swearing by God. And yet Dt. 6:13 had commanded that oaths should be sworn by God, and Lev. 19:12 implies that too, in warning against swearing falsely by God. There is no suggestion that oaths were to be sworn by anything else. This was the point of the commandment not to take the Name of God in vain (Ex. 20:7). Abraham swore by God (Gen. 14:22,23); the formula was typically "as Yahweh lives" (Jud. 8:19). The Jews tried to avoid this, placing the sacrifice, gold, temple and altar in some kind of varied scale of solemnity. But the Lord's point is that effectively, they were swearing by God. The lesson is that all such careful, legalistic attempts to place a respectable distance between God and ourselves in the matter of honesty are foolish and irrelevant. In reality, the Jews were breaking one of the ten commandments, by taking God's Name in vain. And this was the very commandment they were so careful to apparently obey by not even

mentioning or pronouncing the tetragrammaton. The Lord's earlier command in 5:34 not to swear could be read as meaning that people were not to swear by the things they were swearing by at the time (heaven, earth, Jerusalem, your head), but only by God. But seeing God knows all things, the Lord is saying that our yes should be yes, for effectively all that we say is said before God.

That dwells in it- The Lord goes on to say that the house of the Lord was no longer God's house but "your house", and it was 'left desolate' (:38). The glory had departed from it, just as God's shekinah presence is depicted in Ezekiel as progressively departing from the temple. And yet again the Lord is using their own beliefs against themselves. If they believed that God still dwelt in the temple, then the gold in its treasury, the altar and sacrifices were all equally connected with Him. Note that "Him that dwells" in the sanctuary / Most Holy (Mt. 23:21,35 RVmg.) could be a reference to an Angel who dwelt there- see Ps. 78:60.

23:22 *And he that swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by*- To draw a distinction between swearing by Heaven and swearing by God personally was purely academic. Earlier the Lord had clearly stated that there is practically no difference between Heaven and God: "Heaven... is God's throne" (5:34). We note, however, that Matthew often uses "Heaven" as a synonym for God, using language in a way which makes concession to Jewish sensitivities, even though they were mistaken. The use of the language of demons for unexplained illnesses is another example. The Lord could have simply quoted from the Old Testament, as Stephen did: "Heaven is My throne" (Acts 7:49). But instead He works with the false distinction they were making to show it to be false, instead of head on confronting them with the error of their thinking by Biblical quotation. And in that He sets us an example. The Lord's point is that all oaths are before God because He sees all things. The distinctions being drawn by the Pharisees were pathetic efforts to distance man from God in terms of personal responsibility to Him. Whilst we may shake our heads at their intellectual vanity and desperation, we practically do the same within the deepest levels of human psychology. For we too can assume that somehow God is not present, we are not held to be utterly truthful, because of some get out clause of our own creation and imagination. But His omnipresence means that there are no such separations to be made, nor distances to be placed, between God and man. We are directly responsible to Him, in His presence. See on :26.

Him that sits on it- A clear invitation to conceive of God as a personal corporeal being having specific location.

23:23 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you tithe*- The Greek can equally mean to both take or receive tithes. They demanded

and perhaps paid themselves tithes on absolutely everything.

Mint and anise and cumin- These plants grew on windowsills, and a tenth of their 'crop' would've been very light in weight. The lightness of the 'crop' is contrasted with the 'heavier' things which were required of believers. Again, the Lord could've deployed convincing Biblical arguments that the tithe was to be paid from harvested crops, and given to the Levites / priests- not the Pharisees. For they were not the same as the priests. There is no hint in the Mosaic legislation that a tenth of such things was to be given to support the livelihood of the priests. But the Lord goes along with their position- and doesn't say they should not do this. Rather He lifts the issue to a higher and 'heavier' level. In engagement with those who wilfully misunderstand Scripture, it's easy to present a strictly Biblical case which demolishes their position. And the Lord could so easily have done this in the matter of tithing kitchen herbs. But He doesn't. He simply raises weightier issues and principles.

Yet have left undone- The Greek *aphiemi* occurs three times in this verse; clearly a word play is intended. For the Lord concludes the sentence by saying: "... and not to leave [*aphiemi*] the other undone [*aphiemi*]". And He uses it again at the end of His speech: "Your house is left [*aphiemi*] unto you desolate" (:38), and there would therefore not be left [*aphiemi*] one stone upon another in that temple / house (24:2); not one part of the masonry would be omitted or overlooked, every stone would be thrown down. They had omitted the weightier matters of justice etc., thinking they were justified in this because they did not omit to tithe kitchen herbs. But the Lord is saying that effectively they *had* omitted "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs; they had omitted what they had omitted. The double use of *aphiemi* in the last clause is to give the sense of how totally they had omitted [*aphiemi*] "the other", the tithing of kitchen herbs. So although they did tithe them, effectively they had not done so. Because they had omitted the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith. So they tithed, but they did not tithe. Just as we can pray, but not pray; think we believe, when we do not; forgive, when we do not really; read God's word, when we do not really do so [as the Lord often pointed out to them in saying "Have you never read...?", when clearly on one level they had read]. Omitting justice, mercy and faith meant that their tithing of the small stuff was also omitted, in God's final view of them. The spiritual life is intended to be all encompassing, it's not a case of a series of specific obediences to a long list of specific commandments, whereby our omission of the heavier issues is compensated for by our commission of the lighter issues. And this again is a challenge to us all; for surveying God's expectations of us, we can so easily cut ourselves slack in some areas because we feel we are being obedient in others. Thus the failure of the Pharisees in this becomes not something to merely shake our heads at, but a challenge to our deepest internal reasonings in our own walk before God.

The weightier matters of the law- The heavy burdens tied on men by the Pharisees were in fact relating to the lighter matters [s.w. :4 "heavy burdens"]. Clearly the Lord saw there was a variation in God's requirements, ranging from light to heavy. This of course was and is anathema to any legalistic mind, who sees obedience to specific statements as paramount. The Lord is trying to show that life before God is lived in a spirit of life in which omitting the weightier matters means that specific obedience to the lighter matters is thereby rendered void.

Justice, mercy- These were "matters of the Law", these were what the various specific commandments of the Mosaic Law sought to inculcate. Why these three matters? Mercy is part of justice, in that justice must be shown with mercy if we have any awareness of our own moral frailty (James 2:13); just as God integrates mercy with justice in His judgment of men. Mercy and justice are what David praises God for (Ps. 89:14; 101:1). God's judgment of men is connected with His mercy (Is. 16:5; 30:18), and human judgment of situations must likewise be a mixture of justice and mercy (Hos. 12:6; Zech. 7:9). But to exercise these things requires faith- faith that God's judgment of us and others is mixed with mercy. For those like the Pharisees with no sense of their own sins and experience of God's judgment-mercy, this was all a foreign language, just as it is for the many self-righteous legalists of today. Our calling is to reflect God's mixture of justice and mercy on the basis of our own experience of it, and this was the intention of the entire legal apparatus of the Mosaic law.

And faith. These you ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone- Faith is something which ought to be 'done', the Lord is teaching. Faith never exists alone. James argues that there is no essential difference between faith and works. 'Faith' is not just credulity or a vague feeling of hope, but an active, driving force. There is "the work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:11). Knowledge and faith are paralleled in John's thought (Jn. 8:32 cp. 14:1; and 6:69 cp. 11:27)- in stark contrast to this world's emphasis upon works rather than faith. Hence Isaiah's appeals to *know* and *believe* Yahweh (43:10); and the Lord's parallel of 'little faith' with little understanding (Mt. 16:7,8). *Pistis*, one of the NT words for 'faith', is translated in the LXX as both 'faith' (e.g. Dt. 32:20; Prov. 12:22) and 'truth' (Prov. 12:17; 14:22; Jer. 5:1). Indeed, another word used in the LXX is 119 times translated 'truth' and 26 times 'faith'. There *is* a connection between true knowledge of the Gospel and faith. And this faith is the basis for our works. We don't just learn the propositions of the one faith before baptism, and forget them. The triumphant spiritual life *lives them out*.

23:24 *You blind guides*- That they were “guides” is a repeated reason why the Lord condemns them. This is because they were leading others to

condemnation. We play a larger part than we currently can ever imagine in either the salvation or stumbling of others, and this fact of itself should impart to all our interactions a seriousness and intensity. On one hand, deeply sensitive to whether a course of action will cause another to stumble, and on the other, ever reaching out to others with the possibilities of the Kingdom and forgiveness.

That strain out the gnat and swallow the camel- Gnats lived on camels, so this is a picture of how extremely these highly religious men had utterly missed the point. And remember that they were members of the ecclesia of their day, the people of God. Amos 6:6 (LXX) condemns a similar Israel as those "which drink strained wine". The Pharisees would've been shocked by this direct association made between them and apostate Israel of Old Testament times. The context of Amos 6 is about the forthcoming destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple for the sake of the materialism of Israel's leaders.

23:25 *Woe to you Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cleanse*- The Lord Jesus is described using the same word as making others clean (8:2,3; 10:8; 11:5). The Pharisees were concerned with making *themselves* look clean externally. Again, they are a parody of the Lord. He was concerned with making *others* clean, and really clean. This tension, between making ourselves look clean and making others clean, is highly relevant to us all. For there is such a thing as being spiritually selfish.

The outside- The tension between outside and inside, along with the idea of cleanliness, is to be found in the Lord's earlier teaching in Mk. 7:15,18. Nothing on the *outside* can defile a man, it is the *inside* , the thoughts, which must be cleansed. If we ask *why* there is a desire for good appearances externally, the answer may not simply be 'so as to look good to others'. It can also partly be a recognition of our own inner defilement and our sense that we ought to be doing something about it. Peter explores the same tension in 1 Pet. 3:3, teaching that a woman should not focus on *outside* [s.w.] adorning, but not on *internal* attitudes. He's not saying that 'outward adornment' is wrong of itself, but rather that her focus should be on *inner* spirituality rather than focusing on the *external* to the exclusion of the *internal*. Thus obsession with external cosmetic issues, and literal cosmetics, can likely be a running away from internal issues which need serious addressing. So often pedantic attitudes to externalities conceal insecurity, and in spiritual terms, that insecurity is a reflection of disbelief that the inner conscience has been cleansed of sin in Christ.

Of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion- The plate and cup refer to the Pharisees personally. The picture is of silverware being cleansed and shining outwardly, whilst it contains unclean things within. "Even so *you also* outwardly appear righteous"

(:28). And Lk. 11:39 is clearer: "*Your* inward part is full of ravening [Gk. 'extortion'] and wickedness [Gk. 'plots']". They were ever scheming how to get money out of people. But why choose these two items as examples? The presence of the article both times, *the* cup and *the* plate, suggest they have specific relevance. The Gospels were written as the handbook for the early Christian converts and ecclesias. They would largely have been recited or read at the breaking of bread meetings. It's hard therefore to avoid the reference to the memorial cup and plate of the communion meetings. And again, the warning comes so close to home. The memorial meeting is the time to look within, at the likely wickedness within us, rather than appearing in our Sunday best and making ourselves shine externally.

And excess- The Greek suggests complete lack of restraint. And here is the paradox. The most rule-governed people were actually without any sense of restraint. Obedience to rules, and elevating rules, does not of itself mean we are restrained. It can mean the very opposite.

Time and again Paul warns his brethren not to behave like the Pharisees did in various incidents in the Gospels (e.g. Mt. 23:4 = Acts 15:10; Mt. 23:25 Gk. = 1 Cor. 7:5, where Paul is saying 'If you lust inwardly but outwardly appear to have rejected marriage for the sake of the Gospel, you're like those condemned Pharisees). Let it be noted that the danger of Pharisaism, of spiritual hypocrisy, of adopting a hard line on issues which in essence we too fail in, was a great theme with Paul.

23:26 *You blind Pharisee! Cleanse first the inside of the cup and of the plate*- What was within them was a ravening (7:15) for material gain and plotting to obtain it (Lk. 11:39), extortion and lack of self-restraint (:25). There was of course no prescription in the Mosaic legislation for cleansing internal attitudes. But the Lord's command for them to cleanse these things surely suggests they were to think harder about what the sacrificial blood of cleansing might represent. The argument of Heb. 9:9-14; 10:2,22 is that the blood of Mosaic sacrifices could not cleanse from such internal conscience of sin- but the blood of Christ can. The Lord's command for them to "cleanse" their inner parts could therefore find no opportunity for fulfilment within their legal framework. But the language would've recalled David's need to be cleansed in the inward parts after his sins relating to Bathsheba (Ps. 51:2). His request for cleansing was met by God's direct operation on his heart, because as he was aware, there was no prescribed sacrifice which could address his need. The scribes and Pharisees were surely intended to realize that they must ask God for special cleansing; and yet they knew that blood played some role in cleansing. Therefore they were intended to come to the conclusion that God could indeed cleanse them, but through some special sacrifice. The priests and Pharisees who later converted to Christ perhaps followed this

path of logic to where the Lord intended it to lead (Acts 6:7; 15:5). His hopefulness in people finally paid off- setting us a great example.

That the outside of it of it may become clean also- There is a jarring element of unreality here. Cleaning the inside of a cup doesn't make the outside clean. But that is the jump of faith required. The inside is the outside- in God's eyes. This reasoning continues the theme that 'God sees all things' which the Lord has developed in :22; see on 23:22 *By Heaven*.

23:27 *Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs*- A month before Passover, the graves were painted white so that the pilgrims coming to keep the feast would not be defiled. This was therefore something fresh in everyone's minds, for the Lord was speaking at Passover time. Earlier the Lord had used the opposite figure about them: "You are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them" (Lk. 11:44). It was as if they had not whitened / cleansed themselves before Passover as was required. And so again we see the idea that they led men into defilement.

Which outwardly appear- S.w. 6:16 "That they may *appear* unto men to be fasting".

But inwardly are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness- The idea of being inwardly 'full' of unclean thinking is found likewise in :25: "*Full* of extortion and excess". Only from God's perspective is this apparent. We tend to perceive elements of spirituality and also of unspirituality co-existing within a person. But ultimately, in God's judgment, the inner heart is either fully for Him or against Him, dead or alive in spiritual terms. They are full of "*all* uncleanness". The language is in absolute, total terms.
Bones- Perhaps a reference to the spiritually dead house of Israel being likened to dead bones in Ez. 37:1-11, awaiting the coming of the spirit of the new covenant.

23:28 *Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men*- This is the language of 1 Sam. 16:7. Man looks on the outside, but God looks within. And within the Pharisees was not a pretty sight.

But inwardly you are full of hypocrisy- We would imagine that the language of hypocrisy was more relevant to their outward appearance than to their internal state. But they were hypocrites *within*, meaning that they deceived their own selves within, wearing masks within their own hearts to deceive themselves that they were actually righteous. The Lord Jesus perceptively commented that hypocrisy is something which

is *within*- it's about acting out a role *inside* ourselves, a split personality *within* a person, whereby they kid themselves they are someone whom they are not. Their real self and their shadow self are in conflict deep within their minds, in their own self-perceptions they act one way when their real self is something different. And this all goes on *within* the human mind. Hence Paul speaks of hypocrisy being essentially a lie which is told within the mind, and parallels it with a conscience which no longer functions properly (1 Tim. 4:2). The Lord's definition of hypocrisy therefore concerned an internal state of mind- and He warned that this is a yeast which inevitably spreads to others (Lk. 12:1). Thus Barnabas was carried away into hypocrisy by the hypocrisy of others (Gal. 2:13). Although it's so deeply internal, the dissonance between the real self and the portrayed self that goes on *within* human minds somehow becomes a spirit which influences others. And that's how society has become so desperately hypocritical. James 5:12 gives some good practical advice in all this- our yes should mean yes and our no should be no, or else we will fall into hypocrisy (Gk.- AV "condemnation" is a terribly misleading translation). James seems to be saying that we can guard against falling into the hypocritical life and mindset by ensuring that our words, feeling and intentions are directly and simply stated, with meaning to the words, with congruence between our real self and the words we speak.

And iniquity- The Greek *anomia* means literally 'not law', without law. These religious scrupulous legalists were in fact moral anarchists, with no law. This is the great paradox of legalism, to the point that it could be argued that legalism is in fact a cover for internal moral lawlessness. This would explain the otherwise staggering moral hypocrisy, double standards and depth of moral failure observed in the lives of so many legalists. Their external legalism is a cover for their own internal moral anarchy and lack of law and self-restraint.

23:29 *Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets*- *Oikodomeo* means not only to build but carries the sense of 'to confirm', and is also translated in the NT in this sense. On one hand, building the tombs of the prophets was a sign of respect, but the Lord read it negatively, as if by doing so they were confirming the decision to murder them made by their forefathers. We have here an example of where the same action can be judged positively or negatively by the Lord; and this of itself disproves the mentality of salvation by works. Because it depends with what motive or background attitude the works are done, and this decides whether the work was an act of righteousness or a sin. And this is a further warning against the impossibility of judging another's works. For we fail to see those background, internal attitudes behind the work. See on 23:30 *Our fathers*.

And garnish- The same word is soon to be used of how the temple was 'garnished' (Lk. 21:5), and the Lord predicted its utter destruction. In the Lord's teaching, it is the inner mind which must be "garnished" (12:44), the lamp of our own spirituality must likewise be "trimmed" (s.w.; 25:7). Again we see a tension between the Lord's focus upon the internal, and their attention to the external.

The tombs of the righteous- The same word has just been used in :28, where the Lord observes that the Pharisees tried to "appear righteous unto men". And they accordingly made a great show of tending the graves of "the righteous". The implication is therefore that they saw righteousness in terms of imitating 'the righteous' who had gone before them. The whole thrust of the New Testament is concerning imputed righteousness, not attaining righteousness in the eyes of others by our own imitations of men. The idea that righteousness involves modelling some past religious leader of our denomination is not at all dead in these days.

23:30 *And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers*- The Lord takes their use of this phrase and reasons that they were thereby calling themselves the descendants of those who had killed the prophets, and were therefore guilty. That may seem a very harsh analysis and judgment. But the Lord has the power to see meaning in words for good or for bad. All *we* hear are the words, and we cannot judge words alone, because we cannot see the background motivation behind them. See on 23:29 *You build*.

We would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets- Blood is here put by metonymy for 'death', and this explains how the term "The blood of Christ" refers not so much to the red liquid of His blood, but to His death.

23:31- see on 15:2.
Therefore you witness to yourselves- AV "Witnesses against yourselves". The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). And note the present tense of the Lord's words here. In that the judgment process is now ongoing, we *are right now* witnesses against ourselves when we sin. And we are not only witnesses, but also the judge who pronounces the verdict of condemnation: for the sinner is condemned *of*

himself (Tit. 3:11). In this lies the illogicality of sin and the utter blindness of man to the implications of his actions before God. They right now fulfil or live out the judgment of the wicked (Job 36:17).

You are the sons of them that slew the prophets- The idea of being a 'son of' someone or something meant to be in agreement with them, or to be a disciple of them. Again, this seems an example of imputing iniquity. Their usage of the term "our fathers" was taken by the Lord to mean that they 'allowed' or [Gk.] 'had pleasure in' the murder of the prophets (Lk. 11:48). But the same words "our fathers" are used by Paul to describe his faithless Israelite forbears- and he is not condemned for it (1 Cor. 10:1; Acts 28:25). Clearly, the same words can be used by men with different background meanings, and this is seen by God and His Son. But all we hear are the words- we cannot therefore judge them.

23:32 *Fill up*- The language of the iniquity of the Amorites filling up to a point where they would be cast out of Canaan (Gen. 15:16). The Lord is saying that the Jewish legalists were no better than the Gentile inhabitants of the land, and they would be cast out of the same land, to make way for a new Israel, largely comprised of Gentiles. God is not insensitive to sin; the account builds up to a point where He will openly act. The question is whether the Lord was commanding / encouraging them to 'fill up' this measure of sin by going ahead and crucifying Him, or whether He was merely commenting that they were filling up that measure of sin which would bring Divine judgment. If He is encouraging them to go ahead and fill up the measure of sin required of them, then we have here another insight into how the Lord as it were provoked His own final arrest and death, in the sense that He consciously gave His life rather than having it taken from Him. His parody of a triumphant entry into Jerusalem so broke and disappointed Jewish expectations of Him that it could be argued that He was purposefully moving the crowds to turn their misplaced love for Him into hatred, and join forces with the Jewish leadership in killing Him.

The comparison between them and the Gentile Amorites is part of a wider theme, in which those among God's people who break their covenant with Him, He sees as the world. Thus Moses prophesied of an apostate Israel: "They have dealt corruptly with [God], they are no longer his children because of their blemish; they are a perverse and crooked generation" (Dt. 32:5 RSV). These very words are used by Paul regarding the Gentile world (Phil. 2:15). Likewise Is. 42:1,2 concerning Christ's witness to the *Gentiles* is quoted in Mt. 12:19 regarding His witness to an apostate Israel. Israel were to be made like "the top of a rock" just as Gentile Tyre would be (Ez. 24:7; 26:4). Pharaoh's heart was hardened to bring about God's glory, but Paul uses the very same language, in the same context, to describe what was happening to an apostate, Egypt-like Israel (Rom. 9:17). Korah and his company were swallowed by the earth, using the

very language which Moses so recently had applied to how the Egyptians were swallowed by the earth at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:12).

Then the measure of your fathers' iniquity- The Lord elsewhere uses the figure of a measure to describe final judgment. With the measure we measure, it will be measured to us in that day (7:2). So the Lord could be urging them to go ahead and fill up the required level of sin to bring about on *them* the judgment due to their fathers. For this is His teaching in :35- that judgment for all the righteous blood shed by Israel's leaders was to come upon that generation. This may appear to contradict the principle that the sons shall not suffer for the fathers' sins. But the Lord seems to be saying that there is also another dimension to the picture, and that is the principle of imputed sin to those who repeat the sins of their fathers.

23:33 *You serpents, you offspring of vipers*- A clear reference to them as the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

How shall you escape the judgment of Gehenna?- The Lord's whole attitude to Israel showed that they could be saved from condemnation, even at the very last minute. And this was clearly His will. So rather than seeing this as spoken in anger as the final invective against a deeply wayward nation, I am inclined to see this as spoken with a voice cracking under the passion of wanting to save the beloved who hates their Saviour. And surely there was a rhetorical element to it. How they could escape it was to ditch their plans to crucify Him. And the Lord goes straight on in 24:16 to say that even when judgment started to come upon Jerusalem and the temple, they could "escape to the mountains" (s.w.). This was how they could literally escape the coming condemnation; which suggests that surely the Lord did have an appealing, rhetorical sense to His question here. The similarity with that clause in the Olivet prophecy is really a marvel of grace. They who deserved instant death were being given grace upon grace, every chance to change the outcome of their wicked ways. Further, the Lord is quoting here from the words of John the Baptist: "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee [s.w. "escape"] from the wrath to come?" (Lk. 3:7). "All Jerusalem", including the Scribes and Pharisees, had initially heard John approvingly. The Lord is surely saying that the way to escapee the coming condemnation was by doing what John had taught- to repent and accept Jesus as Messiah and Saviour from sin. Again, the Lord's quotation of John's words confirms that He is speaking rhetorically and seeking their repentance and salvation, even at that late hour.

23:34 *Therefore, look, I send to you prophets and wise men and scribes.*

Some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them you shall scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city- This certainly sounds like a quotation from extant literature; Lk. 11:49 introduces it with: "Therefore also said the wisdom of God". The Lord Jesus was indeed "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), and so it could be that the Gospel writers were pointing out that these words of Jesus were a proof text amongst their persecuted converts. Certainly the Lord's words here would've been a good mission statement for the early church. Or it could be that the Lord is quoting some now unknown text with approval. There can be no doubt that every part of the verse has direct relevance to the first century witness to the Jews. The source of the quotation is therefore of secondary importance; the Lord places it in His own mouth, at any rate, in predicting the outcome of the great commission. And yet clearly enough, at the time He spoke these words, that bunch of mixed up, largely secular men, who misunderstood so much, who knew so little, and whose ideals were so misplaced, were far from being the preaching machine which the Lord's words imply here. We can take one simple lesson from this- He had a profound hopefulness in people, a hopefulness which against all odds so often paid off. We, by contrast, tend to be highly cynical of people because we fail to see what they might turn into in spiritual terms.

"I send unto you" is a reference to the sending of the great commission. The Lord's desire was that the worldwide witness began at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47), and Paul's interpretation of the commission was clearly that it involved being sent *firstly* to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The secular disciples were the equivalent of the prophets in the old Israel. There may be particular reference to the New Testament prophets, those who had the Spirit gift of prophecy. Lk. 11:49 adds: "Prophets and apostles". Clearly the witness of the early Christians is in view.

The Lord was talking to the scribes (:29), telling them that He was sending "scribes" to them. And those scribes were men amongst whom were the illiterate and who therefore didn't know the text of Scripture that well. Their qualification was that they had known God's Son. The Lord is here comparing and contrasting the old and new in the starkest possible terms.
You shall kill- As Stephen and James (Acts 7:59; 12:1,2).
And crucify- The Lord implied this would be Peter's fate.
Scourge- Fulfilled Acts 22:19-24; 2 Cor. 11:24,25.
In your synagogues- The punishment of synagogue scourging could only be applied by the Jews to official synagogue members. The fact Paul experienced synagogue discipline by beating with rods shows that he too chose to be a member (2 Cor. 11:24). The Lord spoke as if His followers would remain within the synagogue system until they were forcibly expelled (Jn. 16:2). In all this we see a distinct lack of any 'guilt by

association' mentality with the Lord. He did not ask His followers to break religious association with those who were both morally and doctrinally astray, but rather to remain in those associations until they were cast out. Notice again how the Lord refers to *your* synagogues, just as *God's* house became "*your* house".
Persecute them- By Paul, who was himself later "persecuted" by the Jews (s.w. 2 Cor. 4:9; Gal. 5:11; 6:12).
From city to city- Fulfilled in Acts 14:19; 17:13.

23:35 *That upon you*- One would've expected God to be so hurt by the death of His Son that judgment came immediately upon those responsible. But instead, the Lord predicted that the judgment would come only after the Jews had further persecuted the apostles as they went out to fulfil the great preaching commission to the Jews. This apparent delay was not because God was not hurt or not angry. He was. But His patient love and desire for human repentance, to give them yet more chances, was simply greater. The delay was so that the Lord could send out the apostles of :34 to appeal to Israel for repentance. But they had been given final appeal after final appeal. And still God waited for their repentance. With what eagerness must He have watched for response to the preaching to them, and with what generous provision He would've provided for all those who wished to make that appeal to the Jews. And nothing has changed to this day. The idea of blood coming upon, *epi*, a person clearly meant 'guilt for their death'. Soon the Jews were to be using this very term in asking for the blood of Jesus to be 'upon' them (27:25). Because Jesus was the personification of God's prophetic word and thereby the summary of all the prophets, their desire for *His* blood to be upon them was effectively taking upon themselves the blood of the prophets.

May fall the guilt for all the righteous blood shed on the land- This stands for '*judgment for* all the righteous blood shed'. Note how language is being used here. The sin is put by metonymy for *the judgment for* the sin. Sin is its own judgment. To sin is to ask for judgment / condemnation. In this lies the utter lack of logic in any sin. And iniquity was added to their iniquity (Ps. 69:27- a specific prophecy of the Jews who killed Jesus), just as righteousness can be imputed.

From the blood of Abel the righteous- If that generation were guilty of Abel's murder, this associates them with Cain. The Jewish false teachers are likened to Cain (1 Jn. 3:12; Jude 11); and the Lord says that the Jews seeking to kill Him are the sons of the one who was a "murderer from the beginning" (Jn. 8:44). Cain was the first murderer.

To the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah- Or, Baruk. The prophet

Zechariah would fit this description, but there's no record of him being murdered. Josephus in *The Jewish War* 4.5.4 speaks of a Zacharias ben Baruch who was assassinated by the Zealots in the Sanhedrin. But he was not a prophet, and this event was still future. And he wasn't killed in the temple. However, there was a prophet Zechariah who was stoned to death in the temple (2 Chron. 24:19-22). He was the son or grandson of Jehoiada, so it's feasible he was the son of a Baruk. The Hebrew Bible ended with 2 Chronicles, and so the mention of this murder would form an appropriate inclusio with the first murder, of Abel. All the murders of the faithful, from the first to the last as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, were going to have their judgment exacted from the generation who crucified God's Son.

Whom you slew between the sanctuary and the altar- See on :18 *The altar.* The mention of this detail would perhaps be because the Lord has just spoken of their wrong attitude to both temple and altar (:20,21). He is saying that effectively they had desecrated temple and altar- when they claimed such deep reverence for them. Their mercenary focus upon the gold of the temple and the gifts placed upon the altar was to such an extent that they had robbed the actual temple and altar of their holiness. This was no better than killing a righteous prophet in the holy place.

"Whom *you* slew" shows that the murder was counted to them, in the sense that the blood of those martyrs was "required of this generation" (Lk. 11:51). Sin, like righteousness, can be imputed as part of the downward spiral which operates as the opposite of the upward spiral in spiritual life.

23:36 *Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation*- Even in this prediction of terrible judgment there is grace. Because the AD70 judgments didn't come until nearly 40 years afterwards. Male lifespans in first century Palestine were estimated at an average of 29 years by J.D. Crossan, basing his research on tomb inscriptions and analysis of bones from graves. So the actual 'elders' who were responsible for the Lord's death likely died in their beds rather than in the Jewish-Roman war or the final holocaust in Jerusalem. I can only explain this on the basis of God's grace prolonging that final coming of judgment, in the earnest hope that Israel would yet repent. In the context of AD70, this would appear to be the teaching of 2 Peter 3. We would expect those men to have fairly soon received their judgment in this life. They will be judged- at the last day. But it would seem that God's desire to judge them was in tension with His desire to give Israel the maximum opportunity for repentance. We can only draw a sharp breath at God's grace. Another approach would be to understand that the threatened

judgment upon that generation simply didn't happen- in their lifetimes. The entire Divine program was delayed until the last days, when that generation shall be resurrected and receive their judgment. The events of AD70 were simply a foretaste and prefigurement of the final judgment at the Lord's second coming.

"This generation" is a phrase often used by the Lord in Matthew concerning those who heard and dealt with Him. It is surely the same generation in view in 24:34: "This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled". *This* generation is used elsewhere by the Lord concerning those right in front of Him. It is the same "this generation" in 23:36 as in 24:34. The Lord doesn't, therefore, mean 'The future generation which shall exist and see these things will not pass until all is fulfilled'. He is saying that the generation, *this* generation, would not pass until all was fulfilled. The fact all wasn't fulfilled simply in that generation shows that there was a major delay or change in the Divine program. And the reason for the delay was not simply that Israel hadn't repented, but because God's loving patience was still awaiting their repentance- and He so wished them to repent.

23:37 *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*- It was "this generation" which killed the prophets (:35), so why does the Lord specifically talk here about the children of Jerusalem? "Daughter of Zion" was an Old Testament term used for the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But the way the Lord talks of gathering Jerusalem's residents under His wings is surely because He had a clear vision before Him of how the city would be burnt. For a hen typically gathers her brood under her wings to protect them from a barnyard fire; or perhaps with the intention of being burnt first to preserve the life of her brood as long as possible. And these were the Lord's feelings to the "Jerusalem" which rejected Him and sought His life; He wanted to save them, to buy them some more time at least (as reflected in the parable of the worker who doesn't want to cut the tree down immediately). But they didn't want to know. It was and is all so tragic.

Which kills the prophets- The allusion is to the parable of the husbandmen, who killed and stoned the servants / prophets sent to them (21:35).

And stones those sent to her!- The punishment for apostasy (Dt. 13:10; Acts 7:59). It was their wilful religious misunderstandings which led them to such violence in practice.

How often would I have gathered your children together - He lamented over a Zion that sought only to hurt and murder Him. Yet not so many

verses later in our Bibles we hear the Lord using the same word in saying that at His coming, the elect would be "*gathered together*" unto Him (Mt. 24:31). He so often had earnestly desired the coming of His Kingdom there and then; to gather His people unto Him. But they would not. It must have been unbearable to be such a sensitive person in such a hard and insensitive, dehumanizing world. "How often…" suggests that there were specific times in His ministry when it would have been potentially possible to gather together Zion's children in one and begin the Kingdom. But they refused.

Even as a hen gathers her chickens- We see the Lord's humility here in comparing Himself to a female, humble, farmyard animal- and not a proud lion. Many of the descriptions of Christ in the parables are taken from Old Testament passages describing the feelings of *God* towards Israel, showing the truth of this in the first century context when Israel were still God's people. Thus the Lord's description of Himself as a hen wishing to gather the chicks of Jerusalem is based on Is. 31:5: "As mother-birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem" (Heb.). Lk. 13:8 could suggest that Christ's attitude to Israel was even more patient than that of God Himself; yet because their feelings to Israel are identical, the implication is perhaps that the Son enables and thereby persuades the Father to be even more patient with us than He would naturally be! See on 15:13.

Under her wings- but you were not willing!- This is a classic Old Testament figure, of the faithful taking refuge under the wings of God's cherubic care. The gracious desire of the Lord to save even those who crucified Him is the essence of God's saving care in the Old Testament.

23:38 *Behold, your house*- The temple had always been called "The house of Yahweh". But now it is was theirs, as the "feasts of the Lord" become the "feast of the Jews". The Lord's table became *their* table (Ps. 69:25,22). They had hijacked God's institutions, just as men today have hijacked the Lord's table and imposed their own guest list and rejection policy upon it. Likewise the Lord called the law of God through Moses as now being "*their* law" (Jn. 15:25). The breaking of bread ritual practiced by the Corinthians was eating their *own* supper and therefore their gatherings were "*not* to eat the *Lord's* supper" (1 Cor. 11:20).

Is left unto you desolate- The Greek word is used many times and always in the sense of a wilderness. This is the fulfilment of Hos. 2:3, where God through Hosea had threatened to make His beloved "a wilderness". This is the link with the Olivet Prophecy in chapter 24, which develops this theme of the desolation of the temple and a desolating abomination which was to be placed there. Clearly, therefore, the primary intention of the Olivet prophecy was to the Jewish generation and temple in which immediate context the Lord was speaking. The fact the prophecy clearly has latter

day applications and did not completely fulfil in AD70 shows that there was a change of plan, as has often happened in the Divine program, with prophecies being delayed and reapplied in their fulfilment.

23:39 *For I say to you, you shall not see me from this time forward, until*- The same words are used in 13:14, "You shall not perceive / see" Christ. Previously, they had 'seen' Christ as Messiah, realizing that this was the heir, and desiring therefore to kill Him. But now the Lord was giving them over to the blindness of their hatred. They would not knowingly crucify God's Son. But He was saying that He now was going to stop them 'seeing' / perceiving Him for who He was, so that they would crucify Him. And they would only again perceive Him as God's Son all too late, when at the day of judgment they uttered the words of Messianic welcome "Blessed is He that comes...". And yet even in this terrible judgment there was interwoven a possibility of hope. They would only perceive Him again as God's Son *when*, or, *until the time that*, they recognized Him as Messiah in the Messianic words "Blessed is He that comes...". Once they made that repentance, they would again perceive / see Him. However, it could be argued that that is axiomatic. The thrust of the Lord's words is surely that in the day of judgment, all too late, they would perceive Him again as He is in truth. But all too late.

You shall say- When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected. Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them... they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace.

Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord- When Jerusalem sees Jesus again, they will be saying: “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”. This would suggest they are waiting for Him. And these words being taken from the Passover hallel, it could be that the Lord returns to them at Passover time, when they traditionally expect Him. Indeed, Jerusalem will not see the Lord *until* they say “Blessed is he…”- as if the time of His return depends upon their ‘seeing’ / perceiving Him beforehand.

CHAPTER 24

24:1

Matthew 24: Introduction

Old Testament prophecy was conditional. There can be no doubt about that. Take these words: "Thus saith the Lord God unto the land of Israel: an end, the end is come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end is come upon thee, and I will send mine anger upon thee" (Ez. 7:2,3). But the ultimate end did not come then in Ezekiel's time and the Babylonian destruction of the temple. God's program delayed that ultimate end. Perhaps because of His mercy, the repentance of a remnant, or for other reasons as yet unknown to us and unseen from our earthly viewpoint. My approach to the Olivet prophecy is that it was intended to be fulfilled in the first century- because this was the intended time [or one of the intended times] for the Lord's second coming and the establishment of the Kingdom. Therefore those aspects of the predictions which depended upon God to fulfil, He did [e.g. earthquakes, famines]. But the essential preconditions of Israel's repentance and the spread of the Gospel worldwide were not fulfilled. And so the prophecy has been rescheduled and reapplied to some later time- and it would appear that time is now upon us. This approach may be new to some, for it involves understanding God as 'open', and more responsive to human behaviour than we might have thought. If this is something you feel the need to still get your mind around, then the digression about the nature of prophecy may be helpful. If you have no problem with the idea of God's prophetic word being delayed or rescheduled in its fulfilment, then the digression doesn't need to be read.

We need not get overly worried about the supposed discrepancies between prophecy and its historical fulfilment. Such differences don't negate the Divine inspiration of the original prophecy- rather do they show how God's intentions can be worked out in different ways because of the open-ended approach He takes to human response. Thus it's been observed that the siege of Jerusalem in AD66-70 doesn't exactly follow the descriptions in Lk. 19:41-44 and 21:20-24. This would be because there were within the Olivet prophecy a number of possible scenarios of what could happen *if* the believers fled the city as commanded; and of course, *if* Israel repented and accepted Christ at His AD70 'coming' in judgment. Additionally we must remember that this prophecy was only having its initial fulfilment in AD70- the final fulfilment will be in our last days.

Martin Hengel concludes that the early Gospel records were so radical that they would've been part of an "underground literature". He suggests that the Roman law forbidding oral or written prophecies about the fall of the Roman empire- on pain of death- was enough to make the Olivet

prophecy alone a highly illegal document (Martin Hengel, *Studies In The Gospel Of Mark* (London: SCM, 1985) p. 28).

24:1 *And Jesus came out of the temple and was going on his way when his disciples*- This was a visual depiction of the Lord's previous statement that the house of the temple was now left desolate (23:38). The Lord surely had in mind how the glory of God, which was Him (2 Cor. 4:6; Col. 1:27; James 2:1), progressively left the temple in Ezekiel's time, until the Babylonians came and destroyed the temple (Ez. 10:18), and how the loss of the ark (another symbol of the Lord Jesus) was the glory departing from Israel (1 Sam. 4:21,22).

Came to Him- We sense a separation between the Lord and the disciples. His hint that the temple was to be desolated (23:38) was hard for them to accept. They were probably embarrassed that their teacher had spoken out against the quintessential symbol of Judaism, the temple; which would explain why they come to Him "privately" for more explanation (:3). And in :3 they again 'come to Him', as if they moved away from Him after His confirmation in :2 that He did indeed intend to be understood as saying that the temple would be cast down.

To show Him- Mark says that *one* of the disciples said: "Master, see what manner of stones, and what buildings!". This may well have been Peter, as Mark appears to be Peter's gospel. It was his response to the Lord's previous comment that this house was effectively desolate already (23:38), so sure was God's forthcoming judgment upon it. And Peter is perhaps saying 'What a shame that would be- it's such a wonderful building!'. In this we would see, therefore, another example of Peter, the leader of the early church, being somewhat out of sync with the Lord's intentions- another hint at the weakness of the disciples.

The buildings of the temple- These words are taken over in the later New Testament to describe the building up [often translated 'edifying'] of a new temple, comprised of the believers in Christ. The temple buildings were thrown down *in order that* a new and spiritual building comprised of believers could be built up through the Lord's work in the hearts of His people. The group of believers are "All the building [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Paul, writing before AD70, may have had this contrast indirectly in mind when he wrote that when the earthly house is destroyed, we should remember that we have a "house not made with hands" built by God (2 Cor. 5:1). The same struggle and angst at the loss of physical structures of our religion can be seen today; some find it hard to believe that relationship with God is ultimately personal, and that relationship continues even when surrounding, much loved traditional structures are removed.

24:2 *But he answered and said to them: Do you not see all these things?*- AV "See ye not all these things?". Read this carefully. He doesn't say 'Do you see all these things?'. He uses the negative- 'Do you *not* see all these things?'. This isn't mere style or literary convention. To not see something means you do not see it. Let's not assume that "all these things" refers to the temple building. The Lord has just used the term in 23:36: "All these things shall come upon this generation". And *pas tauta*, "all things", runs as a triple refrain throughout the Olivet prophecy, concerning the 'all things' of the predicted time of crisis coming upon Israel (24:8,33,34). If reading in context means anything, the "all things" must refer not to the temple buildings, but to the "all things" of Jerusalem's coming judgment. The Lord is asking them: 'Do you not see / perceive that all these judgments ["all things"] must come upon these wonderful buildings you're showing Me? No? Then OK, I will spell out those "all things" in gruesome detail. Don't look at the world as it stands before you at this moment, but remember the "all things" of judgment to come which are spoken about them". The Lord has previously condemned the Jewish world for 'not seeing' and He is warning the disciples that again they may be so influenced by Judaism that they don't 'see' the judgments to come with the eye of faith in His word. See later in this verse on *Left here*.

Truly I say to you. There shall not be left here- This again expands upon His previous use of this word in 23:38: "Your house is *left* unto you desolate". He is asking the disciples to see with the eye of faith- that effectively, the great stones of the temple were already thrown down, the temple was already "desolate" (Gk. 'a deserted place').

One stone upon another- The judgment of the leprous house (Lev. 14:41). At the time of the final assault on Jerusalem in AD69, Titus commanded that the temple was to be spared. But the Lord's words came true, just as all prophetic words will, despite every human effort to deny their power. Josephus claims that the gold of the temple melted and therefore each stone was prized apart to remove the gold.

Which shall not be thrown down- There was a strong belief in Judaism that the temple would last eternally. Hence the disciples' question about "the end of the age" was because for them, any talk about the end of the temple meant the end of the world. They are not therefore asking about different chronological events when they ask when this shall be, and what sign would indicate the end of the age (:3). This prophecy of the destruction of the temple implied an ending of the Mosaic law. Hence the same word translated "thrown down" is ascribed to Stephen when he was accused of preaching that the Lord Jesus would "*destroy* this place and [therefore] change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14). Paul uses the same word about his 'destruction' of the things of legalistic dependence on the law for salvation, by preaching salvation by grace in Jesus (Gal. 2:18). It is also the word used in 2 Cor. 5:1, a passage which

seems to have some reference to the impending destruction of the temple and its replacement with the spiritual house of God's building: "Our earthly house of this tabernacle be *destroyed* [s.w. "thrown down"], we have a building of God, an house not made with hands...". All this would suggest that there was a changeover period envisaged between the Lord's death and the final ending of the jurisdiction of the Mosaic law. Seeing the end Lord ended the Law on the cross, this again is to be seen as a concession to the conservatism of the Jews.

24:3 *And as He sat on the mount of Olives*- The word picture is painted of the Lord sitting alone, and then the disciples come to Him. Again we sense the separation between the Lord and His followers. Matthew gives much attention to the Lord sitting (13:1,2; 15:29; 22:44). This is what we would expect of a genuine eyewitness who recalled the Lord's body language and movements.

The disciples- Mk. 13:3 defines them as strictly Peter, James, John and Andrew. Hence they came "privately".

Came to Him privately- See on :1 *Came to Him*.

Saying: Tell us, when shall these things be? And what is the sign- They clearly expected one particular sign, and *semeion* is typically used of a miraculous wonder. Instead, the Lord gave them a series of signs which they were to discern. The fulfilment of these signs in our times is no less than a miracle- that such detailed predictions could start to come true before our eyes. Such fulfilment of prophecy is therefore itself a miracle. The disciples repeat the Pharisees' question about when the end will come- in almost the same words. They were clearly influenced by them (Lk. 17:20 cp. Mk. 13:4).

Of your coming- Without doubt, *parousia* is used in the NT and contemporary literature to refer to a literal and not an invisible presence (e.g. 1 Cor. 16:17; 2 Cor. 7:6; 10:10; Phil. 1:26; 2:12). Any 'coming' of the Lord in Jerusalem's judgment of AD70 was only at best a foretaste of His final coming. It's simply not good enough to claim that He 'came' invisibly or spiritually. The word *parousia* simply doesn't mean this. And yet the destruction of the temple and His 'coming' are linked together; hence my conclusion that His *parousia* was delayed and the prophetic program delayed and rescheduled.

And of the end of the age- See on :2 *Thrown down*. They saw this as parallel with His 'coming' and the destruction of the temple. There is no suggestion that they saw these as three different chronological events, and the Lord's answers give no hint that He saw them as distinct events. Quite simply, the Lord's second coming and the destruction of the temple were understood by them all, the Lord included, as simultaneous. The fact the Lord's coming didn't occur when the temple was destroyed can only

therefore mean that the Divine program was rearranged. For preterism notwithstanding, the Lord has clearly not returned in glory yet, neither did He do so in AD70. "The end of the age" had been use by the Lord to describe the last day of judgment (Mt. 13:39,40, as also Dan. 12:4,7 LXX). The very same phrase used in 13:39,40,49 with clear reference to the Lord's second coming. In no way was the separation between true and false believers, and the punishment of all the latter class, achieved in AD70. The phrase is also used in 28:20, where the Lord sends out the disciples on their great preaching mission with the assurance that He will be with them "unto the end of the age". The implication could be that the end of the age is dependent upon the fulfilment of the great commission. The disciples failed in this, both in performing it [because of their initial hang up about preaching to Gentiles] and because of the paucity of response to their work. And so the end of the age, the second coming, is yet to come- when the Gospel really does go into all the world, then the end shall come (:14). Heb. 9:26 uses the phrase with reference to the situation in the first century- "now once in the end of the age has [Christ] appeared". It could have come then- but it did not. Rom. 9:28 speaks of how God will have to finally intervene in speeding things up- and Paul writes here in the context of Israel's final response to the Gospel: "He will end [s.w.] the work, and cut it short". And the word for "end" is also used to describe how God will end or finally execute the new covenant with Israel (Heb. 8:8)- when they accept that new covenant in responding to the Gospel. Clearly the global preaching of the Gospel and Israel's response to it are crucial requirements for the "end of the age" to come. And there is no lack of evidence that these signs are on the cusp of fulfilment.

Usually, the Lord didn't reply directly to questions (in this case, “When…?”); He gave answers which branched out into something altogether more comprehensive than the original question (Consider Mt. 13:10,11; 15:2,3; Mk. 10:4,5; Lk. 17:20; Jn. 3:4,5; 4:9,10; 6:28,29; 8:53,54; 11:8,9; 14:22,23). *Nearly every example of the Lord Jesus answering a question includes this feature.* To the disciples, the destruction of the temple meant the end of the age- it was a calamity. They assumed that if the temple was destroyed, it must be replaced immediately by their Jesus coming again with his Messianic Kingdom. Their minds were still not suitably distanced from their Judaist background. They asked *one* question: "When shall these things (the destruction of the temple) be? And what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?" (Mk. 13:4). Mt. 24:4 can make it seem that they asked two questions: "When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?". But the parallel record in Mk. 13:4 makes it clear that actually these were parts of the same question concerning the temple's destruction. To the disciples, the coming of Christ, the end of the world and the temple's destruction were all the

same event. It could be that the Lord answered their question by speaking of how there would be the destruction of the temple, but His real coming and the final ending of this world would be at a future date. His answer was therefore fundamentally relevant to his second coming, although built into it was some reference to the destruction of the temple in AD70. As He so often does, the Lord turned round the terms of the question. They thought his "coming" would be at the temple's destruction, and so they asked for signs of His "coming". But Christ shows that this wasn't a correct view: His real "coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30) would not be then, but after all the various signs he described were fulfilled. He was surely saying: 'OK the temple will be destroyed, and many of the signs I'm giving will have some application to that period; but the destruction of the temple isn't the sign of my coming. Note the signs I give you, and watch for their fulfilment: and *then* you'll know when to expect my coming'.
When the disciples asked "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" (Lk. 21:7), the Lord didn't cut short the conversation by saying 'Well actually you can't know, so your question isn't appropriate'. He gave them just what they asked for: signs whereby the faithful would know "when these things shall come to pass". The primary application of all this was that the faithful knew exactly the approaching end of the Jewish age in AD70- everything went according to plan, for those who correctly understood the prophecies. Therefore James, Peter and Paul could assuredly teach that "the judge standeth before the door" (James 5:9) etc. And it is apparent that the situation in the run up to AD70 was typical of that in our last days. Likewise, the position of the faithful remnant in Babylon at the time of the restoration is another type of latter day events. And they too had an opening of their eyes to the prophetic word, resulting in an ability to clearly see where they were, and that the time of restoration of Israel's Kingdom was imminent. 'What will be the signs of the last days?' was indeed answered quite directly, but building up to a personal, incisive appeal to pray constantly that we will be preserved from those horrors and be accepted before the final judgment seat of God's Son (Lk. 21:7,36). It was as if the Lord was adding a powerful caveat- as if to say 'Now don't go and get obsessed and distracted trying to match these signs to current events- worry about how *you* will survive the last days, and whether, when you stand before Me in the very end, you will stand or fall before Me'. And 'Are you really the Messiah? Do you really fulfil all the Old Testament prophecies?' was met by an appeal to not stumble in faith (Lk. 7:21-23).

24:4 *And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one lead you astray*- Warnings against being deceived are a major theme in the Lord's message here (:5,11,24). Paul read the prophecy of deceivers arising in the last days as referring to deceivers arising within the ecclesia, i.e. people who were already baptized, consciously deceiving the

majority of the ecclesia. He repeats this conviction at least three times (Mt. 24:4 = Eph. 5:6; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:3). The later NT writers make the same appeal using the same Greek words, with reference to not being deceived by the allurements of the fleshly life (1 Cor. 6:9; 15:33; Gal. 6:7; James 1:16). And warnings against "them that deceive you" are common, along with lament that many believers in the first century had indeed been deceived (s.w. 2 Tim. 3:13; James 5:19; 2 Pet. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:26; 3:7; Rev. 2:20). Indeed, Revelation is full of warnings and judgment against "the devil" who deceives God's people (s.w. Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20; 20:3). Perhaps this is one reason why the Olivet prophecy was not fulfilled in AD70- the warning with which the Lord opened the prophecy was not heeded by the majority. "Be not deceived" (Lk. 21:8) is extensively quoted later in the NT concerning the need not be deceived by false teachers *within the ecclesia* (1 Cor. 6:9,15,33; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:13, as Mt. 24:4 = 1 Jn. 3:7). The deceivers Christ spoke of were not just bogus Messiahs out in the world, but apparently Spirit-gifted brethren who will arise within the ecclesia.

24:5 *For many shall come in my name*- Coming in the name of the Lord was the formula used in Judaism to describe Messiah (21:9; 23:39). The false claims to be Jesus the Christ are hardly persuasive nor vaguely credible. That they should be a source of mass falling away amongst the Lord's people seems hardly likely. We must assume, therefore, that such persons will have a credibility or a surrounding context which makes them far more attractive than they currently are. Revelation speaks of false miracles being done in the last days. Perhaps views of prophetic fulfilment will become so dogmatically held, suggesting that Christ *must* come once certain things happen in the world, that the believers will be open to easy deception. This scenario would be the more likely if a doctrine of *parousia*, the "coming" of Christ", is adopted which postulates that His coming will be somehow secret, invisible to the world and perceived only by the faithful.

Saying: I am the Christ, and shall lead many astray- The reader who pays attention to detail will note a significant use of pronouns in the Olivet prophecy: "ye" seems to refer to the faithful minority, who would (e.g.) understand, be persecuted, perish, lift up their heads, and finally endure to the end. "The many" (Gk. the majority) in the ecclesia would fall away. No fewer than four times does the Lord stress that "the majority" would be deceived by false prophets, be offended, and have their love wax cold (Mt. 24:5,10,11,12). Probably he connected this, at least in his own mind, with his earlier statement that "the many" would be called to his truth, but not chosen (Mt. 22:14). This difference between " the many / majority" in the ecclesia and the minority of suffering faithful is a theme in the parables which are an appendix to the Olivet prophecy.

The persecution of God's people was spoken of by the Lord as being one of the clearest signs. And he also emphasized that apostasy within the ecclesia would be the other major sign. When they asked him for the signs, Mk. 13:5 says that Jesus *began* by warning them of deception from false teachers. The way the NT writers allude to this passage indicates that they saw this deception as not coming from the crazy bogus-Messiahs of the world, but from false teachers *within the ecclesia*, sometimes supported by apparent possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:3; Tit. 1:10; 2 Jn. 7). A state of total ecclesial apostasy was the sign which Jesus *began* with, according to Mk. 13:5.

Josephus describes the period before AD70 as being when "The country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false Messiahs and impostors, who deluded the people with promises of great events" [*Antiquities* 20.10.13 5,6].

24:6 *And you shall hear of wars and rumours of wars*- Gk. 'to come to the ears'. The dramatic growth of the media and communication will mean that everyone 'hears' of such things. And our generation as none before is in this situation. We can likewise understand the related word (in the Greek): "*rumours* of wars". Lk. 21:9 adds "and commotions", disquiet, mental upset and confusion. Hence the appeal not to be "troubled" within our hearts. Lk. 21:26 speaks of human hearts failing them for fear in worry and expectation (AV "looking after") about the world's future. This sign, therefore, is not so much concerning the proliferation of war, but of human worry about the geopolitical situation. And our generation has been the only one capable of fulfilling this situation. Note, however, that *you* shall hear these things- and the "you" was initially the listening disciples. Clearly the prophecy was intended to have fulfilment in the lifetime of the disciples, but this didn't happen. Because the Divine program was rescheduled.

Ensure you are not alarmed- The word is only used outside the Olivet prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:2, where Paul warns that believers should not be "troubled" by any idea that "the day of Christ is at hand", because the prophecy concerning the great falling away and the man of sin sitting in the temple of God must be fulfilled first. This connection shows that the prophecy of 2 Thess. 2 must have a specific latter day fulfilment on the very eve of the Lord's visible return in glory when "the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to nothing by the powerful glory of His coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). The "day of Christ" is therefore the visible return of the Lord, and this, therefore, is the burden of the Olivet prophecy too. For Paul is taking that language and applying it to the second coming of Christ. And that did not happen in AD70. In Lk. 21:11 the Lord spoke of "fearful sights" being seen in latter-day Israel. During their tribulation, Israel will experience intense "terror" (Lev. 26:16), which would be enough to kill them (Dt. 32:24). This extraordinary level

of fear will be modelled upon that of Jacob as he faced Esau- representing Israel's confrontation with the Arabs in the last days (Jer. 30:5,7). This state of fear will result in many Jews going to live in Jerusalem, as happened during the Babylonian and Assyrian invasions (Jer. 35:11). Ezekiel had prophesied of this time: "Terrors (perhaps an intensive plural - i.e. 'the one great terror') by reason of the sword shall be upon My people" (Ez. 21:12).

For this must happen- but the end is not yet- Quoting Dan. 2:28 LXX, as if the prophecy of Daniel 2 could have had its fulfilment at the time of the destruction of the temple in AD70. Again we encounter the idea of potential fulfilments of prophecy which in fact didn't happen when they could have done. The AV inserts in italics "all these things", but the Lord has only given the sign of worry about wars at this stage in the discourse. He used the identical phrase in predicting that the "all things" of the Mosaic system were to be fulfilled in His death on the cross (5:18). The same term is used in Jn. 1:3: "All things were fulfilled [AV "made"] in Him"- surely a reference to the fulfilment of the Mosaic law in Christ. The "old things" of the Mosaic system passed away, and in Christ "all things are fulfilled [AV "made"] new" (2 Cor. 5:17- same Greek words). There was a changeover period permitted between the Mosaic system and that of Christ, which finished when the temple was destroyed in AD70 and obedience to the Mosaic law thereby became impossible. If this line of interpretation is correct, then we have the Lord hinting that the Mosaic system would be ended, the temple destroyed, but the end was still not to be then. This would again indicate that the events of AD70 were not the "end" which the Lord had in view. "The end" (s.w.) would only come when the Gospel was preached in the entire habitable world (:14) and the believers had been persecuted of all men (Mk. 13:13). But again, the Lord had in mind the possibility that the disciples themselves would endure "unto the end" (10:22; 24:13). It could have come in their lifetime; but it didn't. John's Gospel replaces the Olivet prophecy with the upper room discourse, in which the Lord spoke of His spiritual presence in the hearts of believers through the Comforter. And John's equivalent of "the end" in that discourse is the comment that the Lord Jesus loved His people "unto the end" through dying on the cross (Jn. 13:1 s.w.). This is not to downplay the reality of the second coming, but it is a foil against a mindset that thinks solely in terms of fulfilling prophecy and the literal coming of the Lord. True and wonderful as that is, the essence of the Lord's presence is in His abiding presence in the hearts of spiritually minded believers in Him, and the "end" is His death for us, which in one sense is enough for us all regardless of when He will literally return. But again, Paul, like his Lord, felt that "the end" could have come in the first century; for he writes of how the believers then were living at "the end [s.w.] of the age" (1 Cor. 10:11), when God's wrath against Israel was about to burst "unto the end (AV "to the uttermost"; 1 Thess. 2:16). Likewise Peter: "The end [s.w.] of all things is at hand" (1 Pet.

4:7). Likewise Dan. 9:26 could then have had its fulfilment.

24:7 *For nation shall rise against nation*- Any first century fulfilment is unlikely because the *Pax Romana* meant that the Roman empire was firmly in power and such a situation did not therefore occur. *Ethnos* is the word commonly translated "Gentiles". The picture of nations and kingdoms rising up against each other was simply not fulfilled in the run up to AD70- the Roman empire with their *Pax Romana* did not permit such a situation. And the system of world empires which disintegrated in the 20th Century likewise didn't permit much of this in recent times, especially in the area around Israel, or in the land promised to Abraham, which is the focus of all Bible prophecy. Only in our times has this become a reality, especially in the Arab world and amongst the nations located in the territory promised to Abraham. The language of 'rising up' in revolt is now common amongst them. The picture, however, is of the Gospel going into all those "nations" at this time (:14), all those nations persecuting the believers (:9), and the nations [AV "Gentiles"] taking Jerusalem and treading it down (Lk. 21:24); despite their internal struggles, these same "all nations" will be confederated under a latter Babylon (Rev. 17:15; 18:3,23). The overall picture is of Gospel preaching going on at a time when the nations are rising up against each other, and at the same time persecuting the believers. This scenario is developing- but is as yet unfulfilled on a global scale. But it is daily fulfilling in the nations surrounding Israel, who are persecuting Christians, rising up against each other, and to whom the Gospel is being powerfully preached. Never before has my own mission organization received such major expression of serious interest from the Moslem nations surrounding Israel, thanks largely to the growth of the internet and the growing disillusion with the existing social and religious situation. People from all nations will be gathered before the Lord for judgment (25:32) and people from every nation will be saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9)- confirming that the Gospel will indeed spread to all nations before the Lord's return; it must at least be "proclaimed" to them all, thereby making people amongst them responsible to judgment (:14); the "fullness of the Gentiles" must "come in" to Christ before the end comes and Israel repent (Rom. 11:25). The Lord sent the disciples out to "all nations" (28:19 s.w.); the implication is that they failed to take the Gospel to them all, and therefore the intended scenario didn't fulfil as initially intended in the first century. Lk. 21:25 speaks of how there will be "upon the earth [land- that promised to Abraham] distress of nations", suggesting that the situation amongst the Gentile nations living within the land promised to Abraham is the particular focus of the prophecy. The same language is used of how there were devout Jews in "every nation under Heaven" (Acts 2:5)- and the list of nations in Acts 2 corresponds with the Middle Eastern Moslem world of today. We note that the promise that Abraham should be father of "many nations" was fulfilled in a literal sense in that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arab nations living in the land promised to him (Rom. 4:17). And it is

those nations particularly who have stated their desire to take Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews, as required in Lk. 21:24.

And kingdom against kingdom- It seems likely that 'Babylon' of the last days will rise to political and military dominance in the Arab world. The 10 nations / horns / leaders which exist in the land promised to Abraham- the "kings of the earth / land"- will give their power to Babylon, by force and by political manoeuvre, and this system will then invade Israel. The horns hating the whore implies there will be inter-Arab friction apparent in the beast system throughout its existence. "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24:7) will be a sign of the last days. In the AD70 context, this referred to friction between the Semitic peoples living around Israel; and the Lord's words are clearly an allusion to 2 Chron. 15:6, which specifically uses the phrase about inter-Arab friction. The fragile alliance between them will then be broken by the Lord's return, the horns will hate the whore and destroy her. They give their power to the beast for but "one hour". Daniel seems to associate a covenant which is then broken with the latter day Antichrist. Is. 30:27-31 speaks of the latter day Assyrian as placing "a bridle in the jaw of the people causing them to err", referring to some kind of covenant / agreement which forces others to follow their direction. The Lord's especial fury will be against the individual latter day Nebuchadnezzar who leads the invasion. The future leader of Babylon, after the example of Saddam Hussein, will see themselves as Nebuchadnezzar. Isaiah and Micah describe the latter day invader of the land as "the Assyrian" (Is. 10:5; 14:25; 30:31; Mic. 5:1-6). This itself suggests we are to see the individual who heads up the invasion, the rosh / chief prince of Ez. 38:2, as an ethnic Assyrian / Iraqi. Dan. 8:24,25 invites us to see the same- the "king of fierce countenance" stands up out of the area of northern Iraq / northern Iran.

Famines- There was an acute famine in Israel during Elijah's ministry of three and a half years, as part of God's appeal for Israel to repent and respond to Elijah's message (Lk. 4:25). And so it will be in the final three and a half year tribulation. Likewise it was famine which led the prodigal to repent and return to the Father (Lk. 15:14,17), a clear prototype of Israel's repentance. And perhaps the greatest prototype of their repentance is in the coming of Joseph's brothers to bow before Him; and this too was provoked by famine throughout the region around Israel (Acts 7:11). There will be a purpose in all the sufferings which precede the Lord's return- and that purpose is to bring about Israel's repentance, which is the key condition required for His second coming. There were indeed major famines in the lead up to AD70 (Acts 11:28 "a great famine throughout all the world"); again, the signs which depended upon Divine intervention were fulfilled in the first century, but those which depended upon Israel and the believers did not, because they chose not to. And thus the second coming was delayed. "In the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54) there were four seasons of great scarcity. In the

fourth year of his reign, the famine in Judea was so severe that the price of food became enormous and great numbers perished. Earthquakes occurred in each of the reigns of Caligula and Claudius" (R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000: Baker Books), p. 36). Paul encourages his first century readers that famine and other elements of the Olivet predictions would not separate believers from the love of God- as if he expected those signs to be fulfilled in their lifetimes (Rom. 8:35). The seals of Revelation 6 are full of reference to the Olivet predictions, as if they could all have been fulfilled in the first century (Rev. 6:8 speaks specifically of "famine"). Famine can come quicker than ever in our modern world, where most countries depend upon imported food; and this is especially the case in the area around Israel, where the climate doesn't enable the support of the relatively large population living in the area without food being imported. This explains how Babylon's famine comes in one day (Rev. 18:8). This could never have been possible in the ancient world, where famine required a period of time to develop. Just as Israel initially experienced the early plagues upon Egypt, so it may be that the judgments poured out upon the [Arab?] world at the very end do initially affect Israel too, and lead them to repentance.

And there shall be famines and earthquakes- Just as there was at the crucifixion (27:54), yet another reason for thinking that the tribulation of the last days will enable Israel to identify with the sufferings of their crucified Messiah. Again, earthquakes feature in the seals of Rev. 6:12; and in the judgments upon Israel's enemies in Rev. 11:13,19; 16:18. Again, it seems that Israel will initially experience the judgments upon their enemies, just as they did in the lead up to their Passover deliverance in Egypt which also prefigures their final salvation. The fig tree nation- Israel- is to be shaken of a mighty wind (Rev. 6:13), and the word "shaken" is a form of that translated "earthquake". The forcing of fruit from the fig tree will be brought about by the experience of the earthquake.

In various places- The word "various" (AV "divers") is added by the translators to try to make sense of the otherwise obvious statement that earthquakes will occur in "places". There is no suggestion in the Greek text that earthquakes will occur in various places worldwide where they have not been known to occur. But maybe we have here an intensive plural- the one great place. The same word is used in :15 about "the holy *place*". There are rumours that an earthquake hit the temple area around AD70. But seeing that the temple mount is the bone of contention between Israel and her Arab neighbours, an earthquake splitting the mount would be appropriate. And of course this would link directly with the prediction of Zechariah 14, that when Christ returns there will be an earthquake which splits it. And yet this is used by the Lord as a sign of His coming, rather than a statement about what will happen at His return. It could be that this is an example of how the meaning of time will be

somehow collapsed around the second coming; a sign of His return is in effect His return. Or it could be that the events described in the Olivet prophecy will all happen in a very short period of time, a matter of days rather than years or decades [as is assumed by those who seek to connect the predictions with current world events]. Mk. 13:8 and Lk. 21:11 speak of the earthquakes in *kata* places, but this doesn't necessarily mean 'various' places, but could equally mean 'around'- earthquakes around the holy place would then be signs and portents of the earthquake under the Holy Place which will happen when Christ returns. In Acts 6:13,14 Stephen's enemies appear to have twisted his quotations of the Lord's Olivet prophecy to mean that Christ would destroy the "holy place" [s.w. "places" here in Mt. 24].

24:8 *But all these things are the beginning of the birth pains*- The term is used of the Lord's suffering, which came to term in His resurrection (Acts 2:24)- another hint that the tribulation is intended to bring those who endure it to an identity with the Lord's sufferings, and thus to share in His resurrection. There is therefore a positive intention in the sufferings. They are not merely an angry Deity releasing pent up anger upon the world. The term is also used in 1 Thess. 5:3, in a section full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy: "When they shall say peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them, as *travail* [s.w. "sorrows"] upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape". This suggests that the various trials and tribulations just listed by the Lord are going to come suddenly- they don't describe decades of such things leading up to His return. Rather do they therefore describe a sudden situation which comes at a time of "peace and safety". They may therefore describe the events of days rather than years. The Lord within the Olivet prophecy had spoken of the possibility of "escape" by fleeing, but "they shall *not* escape"- because they will be disobedient to His teaching. The intention of the birth pangs is to forge an identity between the sufferers and the crucified Christ, coming to birth in a resurrection like His. But for these people, the birth pangs are tragic, resulting in death rather than resurrection to life. See on :9 *To be afflicted*.

The Lord is surely alluding to the Rabbinic idea of "the birth-pangs of the Messiah" which they used in description of the traumatic situation in Israel before Messiah's appearance. The Jewish public had initially expected Jesus to be Messiah, and felt that their time was indeed the birth-pangs of Messiah. But the Lord is saying that that time is yet to come. Seeing He did not come in AD70, we are again left to understand this as a reference to a situation *in Israel* which brings about the open manifestation of Messiah.

We frequently struggle to understand which verses apply to AD70 and which to the last days. I have suggested that forcing such a distinction is

unwise because the entire prophecy was a conditional prophecy which began to have fulfilment in AD70 but was rescheduled in its final fulfilment. However it could be argued that Mt. 24:8-22 can be read as a parenthesis specifically concerning the events of AD70: the first seven verses and Mt. 24:23 ff. refer to events of both the last days and AD70.

24:9 *Then shall they deliver you up*- Just as the Lord was 'betrayed' [s.w. 10:4; 20:18,19; 26:2,15,16,21,23,24,25,45,46,48; 27:3,4; 17:22 "the Son of Man shall be betrayed"] to the Jews and 'delivered up' to the Gentiles [s.w. 27:18,26,2 "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate"] for suffering, death- and thereby to resurrection. Again, there is an attempt to make those enduring these things identify with Him in His time of suffering. They too would be delivered up to both Jews and Gentiles- to synagogues [Jews; 10:17; Lk. 21:12] and to prisons, rulers and kings [Gentiles; Lk. 21:12; Mk. 13:9]. Mark adds "They shall deliver you up to councils and in the synagogues you shall be beaten". Clearly the Lord had in mind a first century fulfilment of His words, but as we have seen, not all the signs fulfilled in the first century and the Lord's *parousia* did not literally happen when the temple was destroyed. We therefore have to look to a re-scheduled fulfilment of these words in the persecution of the disciples in the last days.

To tribulation- S.w. "great *tribulation*" (:21,29). The Lord was addressing the disciples, and yet their sufferings were not completely in line with the picture presented here, whereby their suffering was at the same time as Jerusalem was surrounded by armies. Clearly the intended program was delayed. John's equivalent of the Olivet prophecy is the upper room discourse, and the same idea as in :8 of a woman in the sorrows of labour is to be found there, and also this same word for 'afflicted' is found, translated "anguish" and "tribulation": "A woman when she is in labour has... *anguish*... in the world you shall have *tribulation*" (Jn. 16:21,33). The Lord seems to speak as if these experiences will be those of all His true followers, but just as His anguish and sorrow came to term in His triumphant resurrection, so for all who are in Him. John uses the language of the Olivet prophecy but seems to apply it in more general terms to the suffering of the believer in all ages. Surely this was consciously done as a response to the fact that the Olivet prophecy had been rescheduled in fulfilment. Again we find the idea of 'affliction' associated with the Lord's sufferings. Joseph, His clearest prototype, was 'afflicted' (Acts 7:10 s.w.), just as his brothers were 'afflicted' to lead them to repentance and acceptance of how badly they had treated Joseph / Jesus (Acts 7:11 s.w.). Stephen's use of the same word for the sufferings of both Joseph and his brothers was surely to teach that Israel's affliction was in order to teach them what they had done to Joseph, and to thereby identify with Him and repent. And this is exactly the purpose of Israel's latter day afflictions as outlined in the Olivet prophecy, and likewise the reason for the new Israel experiencing them-

to help us identify with our crucified Lord. The same word is used in Rom. 8:35: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Here Paul lists the kinds of tribulation outlined in the Olivet prophecy and assures his first century readers that these will never separate them from God's love- he clearly expected the prophecy to have a first century fulfilment. Likewise the Lord foresaw the possibility of the "great tribulation" coming upon the first century church (Rev. 2:22), and uses the same term "great tribulation" to describe the experiences of those Jewish Christians who would finally be saved (Rev. 7:14).

And shall kill you- "Some of you shall they cause to be put to death... but there shall not an hair of your head perish" (Lk. 21:16) can only be reconciled by appreciating how miraculously the first century disciples were preserved in order to inspire and co-ordinate the rest of the body. Perhaps a similar group of elders ("the two witnesses"?) will be preserved in the last days too. *Apokteino*, 'to kill', is used many times in the Gospels, nearly always with reference to the killing of the Lord Jesus. Again there is the hint that the sufferings of the tribulation period are intended to create identity with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. In John, the upper room discourse replaces the Olivet prophecy. The word is used there for how the believers would be put out of the synagogues [opposition from synagogues is specifically mentioned in the Olivet prophecy] and then "whoever kills you will think that he does God service" (Jn. 16:2). Only religious hatred could explain the mad hatred unto death of which we are reading here- persecution on the basis of thinking that they are doing God service. We can expect, therefore, religiously motivated persecution in the last days. With the collapse of secular Christianity and strong religious commitment in much of the modern world, the only religion likely to fulfil this picture is Islam- and there is no lack of evidence that a worldwide persecution of Jews and those who hold a Jewish rooted faith is absolutely on their agenda, and is already bursting upon us.

And you shall be hated by all nations- But the Gospel will then be preached to "all nations" (Mk. 13:10). It seems that the persecution will result in preaching, perhaps through highly publicized legal cases. If the Gospel is taken to all nations, then this will not need to happen.

For my Name's sake- The phrase rarely occurs outside of the Olivet prophecy; one other time is in the upper room discourse, which is John's parallel with the Olivet prophecy as recorded in the synoptic Gospels. Here we read again that the believers will be "hated… for My Name's sake" (Jn. 15:18,21). But in John 15 the Lord seems to be angling His words not just to the twelve, but to all in Him; for His reasoning is that the world's attitude to Him will be their attitude to us, and all in Him will suffer as He did. Again we can conclude that John, the latest of the

Gospels, was re-adjusting the emphasis of the Olivet prophecy, knowing that it had been rescheduled and would not fully come true in an early coming of Christ in the first century.

You shall be beaten in the synagogues (Mk. 13:9). The Lord predicted that His people would be cast out of the synagogues (Jn. 16:2), as if He was happy that Christianity remained a sect of Judaism until such time as Judaism wouldn't tolerate it. His prediction that His people would be beaten in synagogues (Mk. 13:9) implies they would still be members, for the synagogues only had power to discipline their own members, not the general public. The Lord had no fear of 'guilt by association' with wrong religious views such as there were within Judaism.

Mark and Luke add "It shall turn to you for a testimony". Maybe the idea is that public trial for our faith will be a good public witness. Or it could be that the testimony in our favour is before the Heavenly throne room, where our human situations are as it were played out before the Lord. When the Lord said that His people would preach before rulers 'for a witness / testimony against them' (Mk. 13:9), we are left wondering when and how exactly this will be. It's hard to come to any other conclusion than that this refers to how our words of preaching will be quoted back to the hearers at the judgment. It's an incidental proof that it is hearing the word of the Gospel that makes a person responsible to the last judgment. But in our context, my point is that our words of preaching in this life will be quoted back to those who heard them, at the day of judgment. The simple point is, our words aren't forgotten. They will be quoted back, in some form, at the day of judgment. And yet it appears we can speak and think how we like in this life. Indeed we can; but all these things will ultimately surface again in the last day.

Lk. 21:13 speaks of how when a believer is persecuted, "it shall turn to you for a testimony". Perhaps the Angels give a positive testimony of the faithful believer in the court of Heaven. And at the final judgment, these things will be 'gone through' with them at judgment as a testimony to their faithfulness. Or could it mean that the way we respond to our trials during the tribulation will determine our verdict at the judgment? It will be a testimony in our favour at the day of judgment. In view of this, "Settle it *therefore* in your hearts" to make this witness in God's strength (Lk. 21:14). "In the endurance of you (in the tribulation), ye will gain the souls of you" (Lk. 21:19 Marshall's Interlinear). The run up to the tribulation will provoke a "praying always, that ye may be accounted worthy... to stand before the Son of man" (Lk. 21:36). Peter describes the tribulation of the believers in the run up to AD70 (and therefore the last days too) as judgment taking place on the house of God, in which even the righteous are "scarcely saved" (1 Pet. 4:17,18). This suggests that the last generation of believers will only be saved due to their

response to the tribulation which comes upon them; but even then, only by the skin of their teeth. Lot in Sodom and the parable of the virgins, among others, are hints that the last generation of believers will be in a weak state.

Lk. 21:15 adds at this point: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay". This is alluding to Ex. 4:12, where God tells Moses at the time of the Egyptian persecution of God's people, "I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say". This persecution lead to intensified prayer to God, resulting in the deliverance of the suffering saints at Passover time, after a period of especial distress and 'time of trouble' for the surrounding world due to the plagues. After this deliverance, God's people went into the wilderness and were declared God's Kingdom. We have earlier shown how all these events form a remarkable latter day prophecy. This verse also suggests that the gifts of the Spirit may be given to some in the Elijah ministry in order to enable them to make a more powerful witness (as in Rev. 11:6). The fact they are given personally by Christ would indicate that in some way, Christ is already back at this stage. Time and again we will see how the prophecies of events in the last days are ambiguous as to whether Christ is already back at the time of their fulfilment, or whether they herald his return. Seeing that we will never know the exact time of Christ's return, this is understandable. Similarly Joel 2 prophesies the pouring out of the gifts "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31). Malachi surely refers to this passage when prophesying the Elijah ministry "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). This suggests that the 3.5 year Elijah ministry of the last days (James 5:17) will be accompanied by Spirit gifts, and will coincide with the time of persecution. Note that the gifts were given "before the day of the Lord" in AD70 too. It is possible that because of this possession of the gifts by 'Elijah', false teachers within the ecclesia at the end will also claim to possess them (Mt. 24:24), so convincingly that all but the elect within the ecclesia will be duped into following them. Yet it must be stressed that it is a feature of the gifts that they are unmistakable and obvious to identify (cp. Acts 4:16); it will be evident enough if and when they are poured out in the last days.

24:10 *And then shall many stumble*- To stumble, in its Biblical sense, implies those in view were once walking in the Faith. This is clearly how the Lord uses it in the parable of the sower (13:21 s.w.). The majority [Gk.] will stumble out of the way in this final tribulation. Such a test of faith is logically required for that generation- because those who are alive at the time of the Lord’s coming will be the only generation who never actually die. They will therefore require this particularly acute test of faith; and the majority will fail it, and stumble from the path. The

language of betrayal which is then used would suggest that those who stumble will be like Judas who betrayed the Lord- and he was amongst the believers. It's a sorry picture, but we must let the Lord's words have their true weight and fairly obvious meaning. The cosy church environments of today will simply not be that way during the very last days before the Lord's return. The upper room discourse again has a connection with the Olivet prophecy at this point, because the Lord says that He was warning His followers ahead of time that they would be persecuted and cast out of the synagogues, and He was warning them ahead of time exactly so that they would not be offended (Jn. 16:1). The Olivet prophecy, if taken seriously, is therefore not mere prediction of future events, but rather specifically intended to stop the faithful stumbling as they behold every detail suddenly coming true in the very last days.

And shall deliver up one another- Again, the final sufferings of the Lord Jesus will be experienced within natural and spiritual Israel. Mic. 7:2-9 is a clear prophecy of Christ's sufferings. But embedded in it are words which are quoted in Lk. 21:16 and Mt. 10:36 concerning the latter day tribulation of the believers: "The son dishonours the father... a man's enemies are the men of his own house". In similar manner, some of the prophecies of Israel's latter day sufferings speak in the same context of those of Christ. Mic. 5:1 is an example: "...he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel (Christ) with a rod upon the cheek". The whole of Amos 5 can be scanned for connections with both the future tribulation of Israel, and also the sufferings of Christ.

And shall hate one another- The same word just used for how the believers would be "hated of all nations" (:9). The spirit and religious position of the world will be adopted by some amongst the believers, and they will turn against their brethren as a result of this. This is in line with the language of betrayal just used, replete as it is with allusion to Judas, one of the twelve. Likewise "false prophets" (:11) suggest those located within the community of faith who are pushing a totally different agenda.

24:11 *And many false prophets*- A comparison of Mt. 24:11 and 24 suggests that there will be two particular periods of false prophet activity- at the outbreak of the persecution, and then immediately prior to the Lord's return. This latter group reason that Christ's second coming has already occurred in some non-literal form. Thus :27 speaks as if the clear return of Christ in the clouds will prove them wrong. These men would equate with Peter's description of some within the ecclesia of the last days saying "Where is the promise of His coming?". The language of false prophets suggests they arise from within the community of believers (see on :10). The "many" whom they deceive are presumably the same "many" who shall stumble from their faith (:10). The 'false prophets' of our age are hardly very credible. But if these false prophets have

apparent access to Holy Spirit gifts and claim to do miracles, as passages in Revelation suggest, then they may well have more credibility. This particular sign was fulfilled in the first century, for "many false prophets [s.w.] are gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).

Shall arise- The reference is to the LXX of Jer. 29:15, where we read of false prophets arising amongst Israel whilst they were in Babylon. The message of those false prophets was that Judah would be saved from Babylon without repentance, and that in practice, spiritual separation was not required from Babylon. And this will be the precise context for the false prophets in latter day Israel.

And shall lead many astray- False prophets of both Old and New Testaments were associated with immorality or at least, an easy, fleshly 'spirituality'. With harsh persecution and death sentences for true faith in Christ, the environment will be ripe for such false teachers; and false prophets are believed because people want to believe their message. Four times the Lord repeats this warning against being deceived, using the same word (:4,5,11,24). The words for deception and 'false prophet' recur in Revelation, again in a latter day context (Rev. 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20). The source of the deceit is 'Babylon', the latter day confederacy of anti-Israel and anti-Christian powers around Israel.

24:12 *And because iniquity shall be multiplied*- The LXX of Dan. 12:10 "The wicked shall do wickedly". This is last days language, describing the situation just before Daniel is resurrected. It cannot therefore have had any major fulfilment in the period before AD70. Thus "Because iniquity shall abound (within the ecclesia?), the love of many ("the many", R.V.- the majority) shall wax cold" (Mt.24:12). Bad spiritual standards will spread like cancer in the last days. Thus the ecclesial leaders of the last days must beware of the temptation to be over harsh on the faithful remnant, whilst eating and drinking with "the drunken", i.e. those elements in the ecclesia who will be unprepared for the Lord's coming. 2 Thess. 2:7,8 use the same word to describe how the "mystery [the Greek is a distinctly religious word] of *iniquity*" was already gathering momentum in the first century, leading to "the wicked one", the one of iniquity / lawlessness [s.w.] being revealed; again, we sense the possibility of a first century fulfilment which never came to its ultimate term. "Multiplied" translates *plethuno*, the noun of which is *plethos*, frequently translated "multitude". The idea is that because of the masses being without law, iniquitous, the love of the majority *amongst the believers* will become cold. They will be influenced by the lawlessness of the majority around them; the church will become as the world. And there is no lack of evidence that this is already happening.

The love- The love- *agape* – of the majority will be lost in the latter day community of believers, whilst peoples from all nations hear and accept the Gospel. Could this mean that the established groups of believers lose

their *agape* whilst the real fire of the Truth spreads to the new converts made during the great tribulation, as spoken of in Rev. 7? The parables of Mt. 25 seem to refer specifically to the state of the latter day believers, and they speak of a beating of the fellow-servants.

Of the majority- The presence of the article, '*the* many', means that this refers to 'the majority'.

Shall grow cold- A related word is used in Rev. 3:15,16 in speaking of how the love of the early believers had decreased from hot to lukewarm, although not completely cold. Again we get the sense that this part of the Olivet prophecy was on its way to fulfilment- but had not come to full term.

24:13 *But he that endures*- The idea of enduring to the end and being saved is the spirit of the Lord's struggle on the cross (Heb. 12:2,3 s.w.). Again we see that the sufferings of the last days enable the faithful to fellowship the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. *Hupomeno* ["endure"] is a form of *meno*, the word used so often by the Lord in the upper room discourse for 'abiding' or remaining in Him. Again, it seems John has replaced the Olivet prophecy's call to endure to the end of the tribulation period with an appeal for the believer to abide / endure in Christ to the end of life. The language of the tribulation is applied to the entirety of the Christian's life. 'Enduring to the end' is paralleled with *agape* love not becoming cold; the real endurance is in continuing in the thankless life of love, in the midst of a majority of believers who have lost their way. This is what is so difficult.

To the end- The end of the tribulation period is described with the same term as is used about the Lord's death on the cross being "the end" (26:58; Lk. 22:37; Jn. 13:1). Again we see that the experiences of the tribulation are intended to forge identity with the final sufferings of the Lord. 1 Thess. 2:16 speaks of Divine wrath coming upon Israel "to the end" (s.w.; AV "to the uttermost"), as if "the end" could have come in the first century. Peter was very clear: "The end [s.w.] is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7). Constantly we see evidence for what could have happened- and yet did not. And yet it shall happen, ultimately. And the only conclusion can really be that the final "end" was deferred, the Divine program rescheduled.

The same shall be saved- In the first instance, "the end" was the end of the tribulation period, for he that endures to the end *shall be saved*, but :22 explains that unless the days [the 1260 days of the time periods?] are shortened, then even the elect will not be "saved" (s.w.).

24:14 *And this gospel of the kingdom*- We wonder what is the intention of the emphasis upon "this" Gospel being preached. We are assisted in understanding by the way Matthew uses the same terms in 26:13:

“Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman has done, be told for a memorial to her”. The language is so similar that there is surely a connection. The Gospel records are transcripts of how those like Matthew originally preached the Gospel. Over time, the account they gave became written down, under inspiration. The Gospel message is, therefore, in the Gospel records. ‘This Gospel’ would therefore be a reference to Matthew’s Gospel record, which it was the intention of Matthew and those who had been converted by it to spread worldwide. This would explain why each of the Gospel records includes the incident of the woman anointing the Lord; wherever the Gospel was preached worldwide, that testimony to her would be included. Matthew was therefore proactively attempting to fulfil the Lord’s comment that the Gospel must be preached in all the world. He saw prophecy not so much as prediction but command. It could also be that the “this” connects with the end of :13, “shall be saved”. Salvation is the good news of the Kingdom. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:14). “My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29).

Shall be preached- This could be read as a commandment, not a mere prediction. In this case, the idea is that *when* the Gospel is preached to all the world, then “the end comes”. The marvel is that this amazing preaching will be undertaken by a minority within the believing community, since, according to the preceding verses, the majority will have fallen away. And even amongst those who remain faithful, some will be in prison, others killed. It could be argued that this Gospel preaching occurs specifically during the tribulation period. If we were to take the Gospel to the whole world now, then perhaps this would not be necessary. But in the first century, it was persecution which was necessary to get the disciples to obey their Lord’s command to spread the Gospel outwards from Jerusalem to the world. And it was persecution which made the fleeing Jewish Christians rub shoulders with Gentiles, and thus share the Gospel with them.

In the whole world- The first century fulfilment of these words mentioned in Rom. 10:18 and Col. 1:6,23,26 was because there was the potential that the Lord could have come in AD70. But the Greek word literally means ‘the inhabited’, and more naturally refers to the whole planet. He envisaged the possibility that the disciples would not have gone preaching over the cities of Israel before the end came (10:23). But He did come in AD70, and so the Lord's words here about a genuine worldwide witness must come true before He returns. Note the Gospel is to be preached “in”, *en*, all the world, and not ‘to’ the whole world. This may envisage

there being believers in all the world who preach where they are. This would nowhere near have been fulfilled in the first century. Also, Col. 1:6 speaks of the Gospel having gone to the *kosmos*, whereas Mt. 24:14 requires the Gospel to be preached in the *oikoumene*. *Kosmos* is frequently used in the NT with reference to the *Jewish* world. *Oikoumene* has a more global and universal context and sense. Mk. 13:10 says that the Gospel must be published "among all nations" (Gk. *ethnos*), and this hardly occurred by AD70. Some parts of the Olivet prophecy had a limited application in the first century (e.g. Mt. 24:14 = 10:18), but this doesn't mean that this is the *only* fulfilment of it. It is a feature of prophecy that it often has a short term fulfilment in order to validate the prophet in the eyes of his own generation. It would be strange indeed if the Olivet prophecy had *only* a short term fulfilment.

The great commission bids us go into all the world with Gospel; note the evident connection with Mt. 24:14: "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come". This definitely suggests that the great commission will be mightily obeyed in the last days. There are many other Biblical implications that there will be an unprecedented spread of the Gospel to the whole planet in the last days. Thus Dan. 12:4 speaks of a time in the very last days when "many shall run to and fro (an idiom often used concerning response to God's word: Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; Jn. 8:37 RV; 2 Thess. 3:1 Gk.), and knowledge shall be increased [the context is of Daniel wanting to understand about the second coming of Jesus]... many shall be purified, and made white, and tried (in the tribulation); but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" . This increase of knowledge of the Gospel is to be spread world-wide by many running to and fro in the last days. The great commission will be fulfilled then as never before. Dan. 11:32,33 speaks of how in the time of the end "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits... instruct many". Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The crucial question, of course, is whether the Gospel has truly gone into all the world. One perspective to bear in mind is that in the preaching of Paul, ecclesias which he founded are taken as representing a whole area- e.g. Philippi is called "Macedonia" (Phil. 4:15); Thessalonica is "Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess. 1:7);

Corinth is Achaia (1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1); Ephesus for Asia (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:8). In this sense Paul felt that he had fully preached the Gospel in a circle, moving from Jerusalem through Asia to Rome, and projecting onwards to Spain. Perhaps the Gospel goes into all the world in the sense that believers, however small in number, are to be found world-wide. And that seems to be where we're now up to in the 21st century.

Paul seems to have seen in Christ's prophecy that the Gospel would be fully known world-wide in the last as being a specific, personal command to him (Mt. 24:14 = 2 Tim. 4:17). He saw prophecy as command more than solely prediction; and this is why prophecy has a degree of variation in how and when it is fulfilled. The words of Mk. 16:15,16 are clear: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved". Commands to repent, all men, the Lord's resurrection... these ideas all recur in Acts 17:30, proving they are not solely relevant to those who first heard them; God now commands all men to repent, through our words. These words clearly don't apply to the first century only, for they are intended to be linked with Mt 24:14, which uses the same language about the preaching work of the very last days (even though the context may imply that as a community we will only be obedient to this command once egged on by major persecution). What all this means is that the great commission will be fulfilled in the last days. The connection with the great commission means that the Lord sent out the disciples in order to fulfil this aspect of the Olivet prophecy; but their failure to do the job fully meant that the prophecy had to be delayed and rescheduled in fulfilment.

For a testimony- The Gospel was to be preached for a witness to all nations (Mt. 24:14); and yet "*ye* are witnesses... *you* will be witnesses" (Lk. 24:27; Acts 1:8). The preacher of the Gospel *is* the Gospel; the man is the message, just as the very same word / message was made flesh in the Lord. Israel of old were taught this. They were to keep and do the commandments of God, and *this* would be the witness of their wisdom and understanding to the nations around them- who would thereby be brought to Israel's God (Dt. 4:6-8). The imparting of wisdom and understanding therefore didn't come so much through specific doctrinal exposition, as through living out those principles in daily life.
But *marturion*, "witness", can simply be a legal term referring to testimony or witness in a prosecution. Perhaps the sense is that judgment will come upon all the world once the Gospel has been witnessed to them; it is their receipt of that information which gives them the knowledge which makes them responsible to Divine judgment. For once this witness has been made, then the end comes.

To all the nations- If every *ethnos* must at least have the Gospel of the Kingdom witnessed to them, it's impossible to understand this as having

had final fulfilment in AD70. The fact there will be believers from every *ethnos* saved (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) means that this witness will succeed- against all odds, seeing that at the time, there will be mass persecution and hatred against believers. "Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" connects with "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations" (Mt. 24:39,14). "My name's sake" and the Gospel of the Kingdom's sake are interchangeable expressions (Mt. 19:12,29; Mk. 10:29; Lk. 18:29). Before every 'coming' of the Lord there has been a period of persecution and zealous preaching: Noah preached righteousness before the flood, as Lot probably tried to before the Lord's coming down in judgment on Sodom (would God have wrought such wholesale destruction without giving the people a chance to repent? Cp. Nineveh and Jonah). The schools of the prophets preached from the street corners and temple steps to warn of the coming of the day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians and Assyrians. And of course the dramatic coming of the Lord in judgment upon Israel in AD70, was heralded by Paul and his committed band of zealots staging the greatest preaching campaigns this world has seen. The word used in Mt. 24:14 for "witness to all nations" occurs in Mt. 10:18 concerning our being brought before judges etc. as a witness. Our behaviour during the final tribulation is the witness- perhaps the implication could be that there will be quiet believers world-wide before the final tribulation begins, and their witness under persecution will be the public proclamation of the Gospel world-wide of which the Lord speaks here? In the spread of the true Gospel recently we perhaps see the way for this being prepared. The word also occurs in the parallel Lk. 21:13- our behaviour during the final tribulation will be the witness we make. The reluctance of the early church to throw their full weight behind obeying the command to " go into all the world and preach the Gospel" was only ended by the cosy ecclesias of Judea being persecuted, resulting in their increased appreciation of their hope, and preaching it to those previously neglected nations into which they were driven (Acts 11:19-22). Are the Christian heartlands in for something similar? That the mission fields are so white to the harvest but so chronically short of labourers indicates how nicely such a scenario would work to God's glory.

And then shall the end come- The Lord gave some signs which would be required but would not be the "end" (:6 "the end is not yet"). It would seem that the urgent spreading of the Gospel as a witness worldwide, perhaps in the context of well publicized legal cases against believers, will be the very final sign which heralds "the end". This witness to the Gospel worldwide would therefore be during the tribulation itself, or at least at some point between verses 6 and 14. The witness may therefore take a matter of days, rather than the gradual spread of the Gospel worldwide over a matter of decades. With the nature of the media and instant communication, such global penetration and persuasion of a minority could indeed happen in a matter of days. The high profile, globally

covered testimony under tribulation or torture of even one believer could trigger the conversion of individuals literally worldwide. Perhaps the prophecy of the two witnesses in the last days in Rev. 11 provides more details, or will then be understood as being fulfilled. Even if we cannot quite imagine now how it will be fulfilled, when the time comes for it to be, it will be compellingly clear.

24:15 *Therefore, when you see*- Luke adds "Jerusalem compassed by armies". Jerusalem was truly "compassed with armies" in Hezekiah's time, and perhaps the Lord has this in mind when He predicted that Jerusalem would again be like this in the last days. His subsequent warning to those in the country areas not running into Jerusalem for refuge is also an allusion to the situation in Hezekiah's time- for this was exactly what happened then (Lk. 21:20,21 RV). The "therefore", *oun*, need not necessarily reference the previous clause. It may be setting up a condition upon which something must be done- in this case, fleeing (:16).

The abomination- The word is mainly used elsewhere about the abominations of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:4,5). I would suggest that once the rescheduling of Christ's return was decided by God, the Gospel of John was issued, with its more spiritual interpretation of the Olivet prophecy in terms of the Comforter, and the teaching that the principles of the tribulation are to be lived out throughout the lives of believers. And John was likewise inspired with the prophecy of Revelation, which is clearly based upon the Olivet prophecy and provides further details as to how the prophecy is to be fulfilled in the last days, with the events of AD70 being a partial fulfilment in order to give the prophecy credibility with the generation that first received it. This would be according to the Mosaic principle that a prophet could be judged as true if his words came true- requiring a primary fulfilment of all long term prophecies.

Of desolation- Luke records the Lord as saying that *when* Jerusalem was surrounded by armies, *then* His people should know that the "desolation" of it was near. The desolation is therefore of Jerusalem rather than specifically the temple (Lk. 21:20). The abominating desolation could therefore refer to the invading armies. Seeing *them* was the signal to flee. "Abomination" in the Old Testament typically refers to idolatry or paganism. One interpretation is that the desolator would place some pagan religious symbol in the temple. But this is the sign to flee, and this was only done by the Romans after the city had fallen. That, therefore, doesn't really fit the requirements of the prophecy. The AD70 interpretation notes the pagan standards of the Roman legions, but even they were not placed in the temple. This was defended until the end, until the Romans forced entry, pulled it down and burnt it. As with many details of this prophecy, a future fulfilment is required. And yet we need to note that such desolation was only a visual reflection of the abomination the Jews had committed in the temple: "Because of the evil

of your doings, and because of the *abominations* which ye have committed; therefore is your land a *desolation* and an astonishment, and a curse, without an inhabitant, as at this day" (Jer. 44:22). The abomination which caused desolation may not simply refer to some pagan symbols in the temple area. Josephus records that the Jewish zealots came into the Most Holy place, "placed an imposter in office as high priest, and ordained unqualified misfits to the priesthood" (*The Jewish Wars* 4.3.6–9; 4.5.4). The pagan Idumeans were invited into the Most Holy by the zealots in order to murder the chief priest Annas.

The word "desolation" is used again about the desolation of the Babylon system (Rev. 17:16; 18:17,19). Yet Babylon will be judged according to what it did to God's people- the judgment for 'desolating' will be 'desolation'. Yet the Olivet prophecy clearly intended the Roman armies to be the means of the desolation, but I suggest that Revelation extends the prophecy by giving more detail, and describing the system of desolation as 'Babylon'. And that system clearly has similarities with Rome- it could have been fulfilled in Rome, but because the fulfilment of the prophecy was rescheduled, we can look for another equivalent of the enigmatic 'Babylon' of the last days. The "desolation" referred to is clearly to be understood as the fulfilment of Dan. 9:26,27 LXX, which says that the abomination that desolates will come "after the cutting off of Messiah the Prince". Whilst how long "after" is not defined, we are surely intended to understand that the desolating abomination comes soon after the death of Messiah: "The people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and *the end* thereof ("then shall *the end* come", Mt. 24:14) shall be with a flood, ("as the days of Noah..."), and unto *the end* shall be war; *desolations* are determined . . . and upon the temple of *abominations* shall come one that makes *desolate* (cp. "your house is left unto you desolate", Mt.23:38), even unto the consummation, and that determined shall be poured out upon the desolated" (LXX). And yet note that that prophecy itself had had various potential fulfilments which didn't come true. So it is fair to think that it could have had a fulfilment in AD70, but this was again deferred- for the same reason as ever, Israel's lack of repentance (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel').

Which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place- Mk. "where it ought not". "Holy place" is without the article, and could refer to any holy place. The contrast is with the Lamb who will descend to the temple mount and "stand" there [s.w. Rev. 14:1]. This will be the final showdown between the real Christ and the fake one, as likewise foreseen in the prophecy of the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2, where again the place of showdown is the temple. For this to be a sign to the believers to flee to the mountains, any application to the triumphant Roman legions placing their standards in the temple at the *end* of the Jewish war is precluded. And historically, it is doubtful whether that

happened, as the temple was burnt with fire and the legions were told *not* to do this.

Let him that reads understand- The vast majority of first century believers were likely illiterate. So this may be an appeal to teachers to correctly understand and teach. The Lord speaks in a latter day context about "let him that readeth understand" Daniel's prophecies (Mk. 13:14)- referring to the special gift of understanding them which Daniel himself was told would come in the very end time. But note the parallels in the Lord's teaching here: "Let him… understand… let him… not go down… let him… not return… let them… flee". The understanding He refers to is not merely academic. It is the understanding that will lead to concrete action.

The Lord's Olivet prophecy as recorded by Mark has so many allusions to the Maccabean revolt under Mattathias ("the abomination", flight to the hills, "let the reader understand" and many other phrases are all quotations from 1 Macc. 1-3). But in this context the Lord warns of false Messiahs- as if He considered the Maccabean heroes to be just that. And interestingly it is Mark more than any other Gospel writer who stresses the Messiahship of Jesus throughout the crucifixion record. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews a contradiction in terms. The idea of Jewish revolutionaries marching triumphantly to Jerusalem to liberate it was common in Jewish thought at the time- but Luke emphasizes that Christ's last journey to Jerusalem and triumphant entry to it was in fact in order to die the death of the cross there. The battle had been redefined by the Lord Jesus- not against Rome, but against internal sin and Jewish religious hypocrisy. Victory was by self-crucifixion, not military might. This was just too much for Jewish nationalism, just as legalists today end up baying for the blood of those who preach grace and not works.

There are a number of hints that there will be a progressive growth in Biblical understanding amongst the latter day faithful. In the spirit of Daniel 12:4, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was " yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run" - using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him " understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When

you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then... do something about it'. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive, comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them.

"Let him that reads understand" is inviting us to be like Daniel in Dan. 9:22-25, who also wanted to understand the meaning of the "abomination" prophecy. But he was told that the meaning of that vision about the abomination that desolates would only be revealed in the very last days, i.e. at the time of its fulfilment (Dan. 8:17,26; 12:9). The implication of all this is that there will be believing Jews living in the Jerusalem area at the time of the setting up of the abomination; and they will have special understanding of this prophecy which will lead them to flee. The importance of this for our present study is that this indicates that there will be believers in Israel just before the Lord returns. They will have "understanding" and will be motivated by this to respond. "*Let him*… understand" is paralleled with "*let him* that is on the housetop [flee immediately]… *let him* that is in the field not return". Understanding leads to action- both then and now.

In the spirit of Daniel, Habakkuk was told that the full understanding of his vision concerning the latter day judgment of Babylon was "yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie", and *at that time* the one who reads and understands it will "run"- using the same idiom as in Dan. 12:4 concerning the latter day believers 'running' in response to their understanding of God's word (Hab. 2:2,3). The Olivet prophecy repeatedly talks about 'seeing' or (Gk.) understanding things and then acting upon this knowledge. The English translation somewhat masks this. Thus Mt. 24:15 "Whoso *readeth*" uses a Greek word which really means to recognize, distinguish- and he who recognizes, understands, let him "understand" or, better, *meditate*. Or again, "When ye shall see (Greek, to know, perceive) the abomination that maketh desolate..." (Mt. 24:15). This might suggest that the "abomination" isn't necessarily something physical. The idea seems to be 'When you understand that the abomination that makes desolate is in place, then...', rather than 'When you see (physically) on the telly or in the newspaper an abomination in Jerusalem, then...do something about it'. "Let him that readeth understand" is yet another Olivet allusion back to Daniel (12:10); yet generations of believers have read those very words and *not* understood. Presumably the latter day remnant *will* clearly understand Daniel's enigmatic words about the abomination. Whilst we should live *as if* we expect the Lord's imminent return, it has to be said that we don't seem to have yet reached this level of understanding. "When ye shall see (Gk. perceive, understand) all these things, (then you will) know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33). "Behold (same Greek: perceive,

comprehend) the fig tree..." (Lk. 21:29). The emphasis is undoubtedly on the need for understanding of the signs, not just observing them. The expansion of understanding may be not only of prophecies like Habakkuk, Daniel and Revelation. Because Revelation especially is so full of reference to other passages throughout the Scriptures, our comprehension of the whole Bible will go into another paradigm. It may be that in the last days, *all* the words of God will in some sense be fulfilled (Rev. 17:17)- we will realize that the whole Bible is especially speaking to us, the last generation. Many of the parables are specifically aimed at the last generation of believers- they have a very secondary application to believers of other ages. They are specifically about the attitudes of those who will be alive when the Lord comes in glory; e.g. the wise and foolish virgins, or the men given talents, or the servants left watching the household etc. The Lord's letters in Revelation speak of him being about to come, as do many other NT passages. They were written specifically for the last generation of believers! Their full meaning and relevance will therefore only be perceived by that generation. Take Rev. 3:20 as an example: "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me". Whatever else this may be taken to mean, according to its connections with other passages, this is clearly relevant to the Lord's second coming; the believer who responds to the Lord's voice in the last days will be rewarded with the Lord's coming. Verses like this and the parables mentioned above are pre-eminently relevant to the last generation. No wonder there will be a growth in understanding in the last days!

24:16 *Then let those who are in Judea flee*- The same word was used by the Lord in introducing the Olivet prophecy in 23:33: "How can you *escape* the condemnation of Gehenna?". The way of escape was through obedience to His word. Clearly the Lord intended His words to be fulfilled in that immediate generation; but fleeing to the mountains did not bring ultimate salvation because the Lord did not return as intended. His coming has been rescheduled, and perhaps utter salvation for the Jewish remnant in the land will likewise depend upon 'fleeing'. The Old Covenant had specified that Israel would flee before their enemies if they broke the covenant; the command to 'flee' may therefore be an invitation to accept guilt for their sin, and thereby be saved through the very act of recognizing the justice of their judgment. For this is the essence of the salvation of every man in Christ. It could be that Rev. 12:6 provides more details, in speaking of the faithful fleeing into the wilderness and thereby being saved. This was the way to flee the coming condemnation (23:33; Lk. 3:7). The Lord's words require[d] some faith to accept, because if Jerusalem were surrounded by armies, how could the faithful flee? Josephus explains that the Roman legions did in fact withdraw for a time, allowing civilians to flee (B.J.2.19.6,7).

To the mountains- Better, 'toward'. Clearly this was capable of fulfilment in the Jewish war, in a fairly literal sense. But what is the latter day equivalent? "The mountains" could be an intensive plural for the one great, special, obvious mountain. The same word is found earlier in the chapter- the Lord is saying these words sitting on "the mount" of Olives (:3). And it is to that mount that He will return, according to Acts 1:12 and Zechariah 14. It could be, therefore, in a literal or figurative sense, an appeal to move towards the mount of Olives to meet Him at His return. Perhaps in a literal, geographical sense, that area will be the only area left by the invading armies, and they will surround the faithful Jewish remnant on that mount- and then the Lord shall come. But such speculation is unhelpful, because the principle of prophecy is that when it happens, then we shall understand. I do not believe we are intended to work out a sequence of events ahead of time. Indeed, given the conditional nature of Bible prophecy, that is impossible to do anyway.

As the faithful remnant were miraculously allowed to leave Sodom for the mountains, immediately unleashing the Divine judgments by doing so, the faithful Christian remnant were allowed to leave Jerusalem just before the final Roman onslaught of AD70, doubtless spurred on by their Lord's command: "Let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it (Jerusalem) depart out" (Lk. 21:21). The reference to fleeing to the mountains would have suggested a conscious allusion back to the command to Lot to flee out of Sodom "to the mountain" (Gen. 19:17). "Then let them which be in Judaea flee to the mountains" may mean that there will be Jewish believers in Jerusalem in the last days, seeing the whole prophecy has yet to be totally fulfilled (the AD70 application of these words was at best limited). Dan. 12:1 says that in the final tribulation of Israel, those Jews who are "written in the book", i.e. who are acceptable saints (Ex. 32:32; Rev. 21:27) will be delivered. So there will be a minority in latter day natural Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, as in Elijah's time- which is typical of the situation at the latter day Elijah ministry. This is certainly encouragement enough to make witness to and within Israel a priority.

24:17 *Let him that is on the housetop*- The idea is that flight could be taken by jumping from housetop to housetop, without going back into the house. Escaping that way would best be done in any case without carrying anything. This is clearly language relevant specifically to first century Palestine, and is a parade example of how the prophecy was ideally intended for fulfilment then. The latter day fulfilment of these words will therefore only be in essence, rather than in detail. That is a principle we must bear in mind when considering many other Bible prophecies; the essence but not necessarily the detail will be fulfilled in the rescheduled and delayed version of their fulfilment. The implication of the language here and in :18 is that the sign to flee will be momentary; the signs are not, therefore, to be perceived over decades or even years,

leading slowly towards the Lord's coming. Rather these signs, especially of the abomination, will appear suddenly, to the extent that the believer must flee immediately, quite literally without a moment to lose.

But this reflection leads us to wonder whether the fleeing away in a split second, be it from the field or housetop, is more likely a reference to the need to respond immediately to the call to leave secular life and go to meet the Lord. The example of a person in the field (:18) needing to leave immediately naturally connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". This would dovetail well with the implication elsewhere that the immediacy of our response to the knowledge that 'He's back!' will effectively be our judgment. Those who themselves want to go to Him will be snatched away and meet Him, whilst those who delay will be rejected, as the foolish virgins who went first to buy oil.

Not go down to take out things that are in his house- The allusion is clearly to Lot fleeing Sodom, also "to the mountains" (:16). This is a type of the response of the believers to the call to judgment at the Lord's return. If we don't separate from the world, we will share their judgment. The immediacy of response is so stressed, and will be ultimately indicative of where our heart is. Any desire to gather any material possessions will reveal that our heart is not wholly and solely with the Lord. But the Greek could equally mean 'to take anyone [person] out of his house / family'. This again is a high demand- the demand of the Sermon on the Mount, to put family in second place behind personal loyalty to the Lord Jesus. All who love the Lord in spirit and in truth will respond to the sign or call to leave with immediacy. They will know that in any case, they are powerless to drag their unbelieving family members with them.

24:18 *And let him that is in the field not return back to take his cloak*- The immediacy of response is clear. Even grabbing an outer garment, equivalent of a jacket, would lead to unworthiness and destruction. The call to leave must be responded to immediately, with the faith that what clothing we have on is utterly irrelevant. This only really makes sense if the call or sign to escape is the call to judgment- and this verse connects with the words of :40 about the snatching away of the believers at the Lord's return: "Two shall be in the field, the one shall be taken, and the other left". See on :17.

24:19 *But woe to them that are with child and to them that give suck in those days!*- This may well match Paul's warning against marrying in the last days in 1 Cor.7. He understood the Olivet prophecy as having the real prophecy of fulfilment in his generation. As He hung on the cross, our Lord quoted this part of His Olivet prophecy to the women who stood by (Lk. 23:29 "blessed are [those] who never gave suck" = Mt. 24:19 "Woe

to them… who give sick", s.w.), concerning the sufferings of the believers in the 'last days'. Here we see His matchless selflessness; going out of His own sufferings, to think, with anguish, how they would be experienced by His followers in the tribulation. "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves... for if they do these things (to) a green tree (the spiritually healthy Lord Jesus), what shall be done (to) the dry", the spiritually barren tree of Israel. This is a superb essay in the Lord's selflessness and minimizing of his own sufferings: he felt that what he was going through was less than what the spiritually weak would have to go through in the AD70 tribulation (and that of the last days). In the other 11 occurrences of "woe" in Matthew, the objects of the "woe" are clearly the unfaithful and the condemned; this category of those "with child" are therefore not amongst those who obediently 'flee'. Lk. 21:23 states that they would be amongst those who would suffer the "wrath upon this people". In Lk. 23:29 the Lord clearly envisaged the women of His generation, the ones who lined the road to Golgotha, as experiencing the trauma He predicted in the Olivet prophecy. And yet it is clear enough that the final fulfilment is yet to come- because His coming was rescheduled.

24:20 *And pray that your flight is not in the winter, nor on a Sabbath*- The "flight" refers to the opportunity given to the civilians of Jerusalem to flee. These opportunities were in October AD67 and in Spring AD70. "The Sabbath" refers more likely to the Sabbath Year rather than to the weekly Sabbath. There would've been little food in the Sabbath year because the land was not to be planted that year. The Sabbath year at the time was AD68/69 (the last Sabbath year ever observed in the land). So perhaps we can reason from these facts that the Lord's words were heeded, the faithful did pray as He recommended- and so they did not flee in Winter (but rather in Autumn 67 and Spring 70), nor in the Sabbath year.

The Lord's request for prayer indicates that the exact timing of events in the tribulation will be changeable in accordance with the fervency of our latter day prayers. Changeable time periods has been a feature of God's prophetic dealings with Israel (see the Digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel'); and :22 is explicit that the [intended number of] days will be shortened. An AD70 application for this is hard to find; it may be that the exact timing of the Roman offer of amnesty was dependent on the intensity of prayer by the besieged Jerusalem ecclesia. That ecclesia, rent as they were by schism, false doctrine and materialism (if we accept the evidence that Hebrews was addressed to them) was a type of the faithful remnant of the last days. They were finally sorted out by the events of AD67 - 70, cp. the latter day tribulation.

Lk. 21:24 adds: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". The allusion is to Dan. 8:13: "The transgression of desolation gave both the sanctuary and the host (i.e. the

people of Israel) to be *trodden underfoot".* This part of Luke 21 is clearly alluding to Zechariah 14, a prophecy about the final desolation of Jerusalem:

Luke 21	**Zechariah 14**
20. Jerusalem surrounded by armies	2. All nations against Jerusalem to battle
20. The desolation of Jerusalem is near	2. The city shall be taken
21. Let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains	5. You shall flee to the ... mountains
22. Great distress in the land	2. Houses ransacked, women raped.
24. Led away captive into all nations	2. Half the city shall go into captivity
24. Jerusalem trodden down by the Gentiles.	12:3 LXX Jerusalem a stone trodden down by the Gentiles.

The context of Zechariah 14 is clearly concerning the last days and the literal appearance of Messiah in Israel. The way the Olivet Prophecy alludes to it, indeed is based upon it, shows that it too requires reference to the last days. Any limited fulfilment in AD70 was only a partial foretaste of the final outworking of the prophecy. I have explained in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel' that Dan. 8:13 itself was a prophecy which had already had various possible fulfilments but had already had its fulfilment rescheduled a few times. It is therefore unsurprising if its intended, or possible, fulfilment in AD70 was again rescheduled.

24:21 *For then*- Mk., "in those days". Mk. 13:19 speaks of how "in those days" those in Judaea should flee to the mountains; "for *in those days* shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of creation... neither shall be (referring to Dan. 12:1 concerning our last days)... except that the Lord had shortened *those days*... *in those days*, after that tribulation... *then* shall they see the son of man coming". Surely "in those days" shouts for a continuous application to the same "days" - the days of the second coming, the days during which the obedient 'flee' (and I have suggested that may be in response to the Angelic invitation to go meet the returning Lord Jesus). At best, "those days" can have a primary reference to the events of AD70, but the *main* fulfilment of the whole prophecy must be in the last days. This point seems impossible to answer by those who disallow any reference to the second coming.

Shall be great tribulation- The LXX uses this same word for "tribulation" in several passages pregnant with latter day significance:
"The day of my [Jacob's] *distress*" at the hands of Esau (Gen. 35:3)
"The *anguish* of his [Joseph's] soul" at the hands of his half brethren and

the Ishmaelites (Gen. 42:21)
"I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and *troubles* shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?" (Dt. 31:17)- a passage in the Song of Moses regarding Israel's latter day tribulations.
"Thus saith Hezekiah, This day is a day of *trouble*, and of rebuke, and blasphemy" (2 Kings 19:3)"- Sennacherib's Assyrian invasion at this time was a clear prototype for the latter day invasion described in Ezekiel 38 and elsewhere.
"The time of Jacob's *trouble*" from which he will be delivered (Jer. 30:7) The "day of trouble" in Hezekiah's time, when Jerusalem again was surrounded by armies (Is. 37:3), and saved by a visible 'coming' of the Lord against the Assyrian confederacy.

"There shall be a time of *trouble*, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. 12:1). This time of trouble is specifically for Israel in the last days. This verse would appear to be in the Lord's mind at this time. The same Hebrew phrase for "day of trouble" is repeatedly used about the traumas of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian invaders (Is. 33:2; 37:3; 65:16; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 14:8; 15:11; 16:19; 30:7; Obadiah 12,14; Zeph. 1:15). These historical situations were clearly intended to be understood as precursors of the final tribulation of Jerusalem, again at the hands of the neighbouring nations. The time of "trouble" [*tsarah*] in Dan. 12:1 is literally 'the time of the enemy / adversary', and the same word is used of the time (Esther 4:14) of the enemy and adversary [*tsar*] in Esther 7:4,6, when again the Jews were threatened with destruction at the hand of the Agagite / Gog of Haman.

Since the beginning of the world- Mk. 13:19 "From the beginning of creation". But the allusion is to Dan. 12:1, "Since there was a nation", and the context suggests the idea is 'Since *Israel* were ever a nation'. The "world" in view may therefore be the Jewish world, and "creation" is being used as Judaism sometimes used the term, to refer to the creation of the nation at Sinai. The use of the phrase "the beginning of creation" rather than just "creation" would suggest that the creation of the world in view was an ongoing process, which is a beautiful insight into the nature of God's natural and spiritual work with the world of believers, with Israel, and even with the natural creation.

Until now, no, nor ever shall be- surely only applicable to the last days, the time of Jacob's trouble predicted in Jeremiah. Clearly the main fulfilment cannot be limited to AD70. The threat to "all flesh" in :22 likewise cannot be seriously applied to the situation of AD70. The language of Lk. 21:28 is also impossible to apply to AD70: "But when

these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near". The allusion is obviously to Dan. 12:1: "A time of trouble such as never was". I have shown in the digression 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel' that this particular prophecy had various possible fulfilments; and in harmony with that history, it could have been fulfilled in AD70, that was the intention, but the preconditions were not all fulfilled, and therefore its ultimate fulfilment was delayed until the final 'last days'. The "time of trouble" in Dan. 12:1 is after Michael 'stands up', after the visible manifestation either of the Lord Jesus personally, or the Angel Michael who represented Him in the court of Heaven. The "time of trouble" is therefore in the very last days, perhaps literally days, the "then" of this verse 21 in Matthew 24, the time when the faithful have already dropped their jackets and left their homes to go to meet the Lord. It is inappropriate, therefore, to describe our present times *before* that period as "the time of trouble such that never was". And it may be that Dan. 12:1 specifically refers to this unprecedented time of trouble as being for *Israel*- trouble such as never was since they were a nation.

24:22 *And except those days had been shortened*- The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem for a year before it fell, but the Roman siege lasted about five months- according to Josephus, from April 14 to September 8. God can shorten intended time periods at will, for time is seen by Him in a different dimension and context to our experience of it. According to 2 Sam. 24:15,16 LXX, it would seem that the three days of intended plague became one day, because of David's prayer and repentance, and God's pity; "the Lord repented Him of the evil". It seems this shortening happened- for 1 Cor. 7:29 RV says that "the time is shortened", in clear allusion to the Lord's words here. Perhaps this is why it was intended that there be 40 years from AD33 [the crucifixion] to the destruction of the temple; but this period was "shortened" by at least 3 years "for the elect's sake". And the situation in the 1st century is evidently typical of ours today in these last days. They were to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath or in the Winter, i.e. that the abomination that made desolate would not be set up at those times. Clearly prayer affected the exact chronology of events and thereby the fulfilment of prophecy.

The Greek tense specifically means that the days had already been shortened. And yet the verse concludes with the future tense: "The days will be shortened". The Lord Jesus was confident that although the shortening was yet future, it had in essence been achieved. This may well have been by the Lord's intercession. In this case, Mk. 13:20 would be a comment inserted by the evangelist, referring to the Lord Jesus: "The Lord had shortened the days… He has shortened the days". See on *The elect*. According to the parable of Lk. 13:8, the Lord Jesus had persuaded the Father to extend an intended time period for Israel's repentance, and had gained at least another year or half year of patient waiting for

spiritual fruit on Israel. It's quite possible, therefore, that the intended "days" of suffering had already been reduced by the Lord's intercession, because He foresaw the weakness of the latter day "elect"; and also, simply was heartbroken at the prospect of all the suffering He was predicting. 2 Pet. 3:12 says we can hasten the coming of the day of the Lord- perhaps the Lord was speaking in faith that elect would indeed hasten it and thereby shorten the days. Hence He speaks in both past and future tenses concerning the shortening of the days. And yet on the other hand, it is the delay of judgment which allows opportunity for repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:15). Thus in the final algorithm controlling the coming of Christ, there are delay factors and hastening factors. The vision will in one sense "not delay / tarry" (Hab. 2:3 RV). And yet the same verse speaks of how it does "tarry". Perhaps in a human sense it delays, but not from God's perspective. "It hasteth toward the end" (Hab. 2:3 RV) could imply that things are speeded up in their fulfilment in the very end time; for the elects sake the days until the second coming are shortened (Mk. 13:20). And yet things are also delayed- the bridegroom tarries / delays, to the point that many realize that the Lord has delayed His coming, and begin to act inappropriately. One reconciliation of these paradoxes could be that some prophecies are speeded up in their fulfilment because of the elect would otherwise lose their faith; and yet other prophecies seem to be delayed in fulfilment because of the unspirituality of others. The possibility of changing the fulfilment of prophetic time periods is to be found in Hab. 3:2: "In the midst of the years revive..."- i.e. please, God, do it immediately rather than waiting until the end of days. The difference in tenses between "has shortened" and "will shorten" may also simply reflect how God conceives of time in a radically different way to how we do. The shortening of time in a sense hasn't take place, but in another sense it has. There can therefore be no trite explanation of how God can hasten the second coming in accordance with our prayers, and yet also have a set time to favour Zion.

With so many allusions to Daniel's prophecies, perhaps "the days" in view are those of Daniel's various prophecies. Perhaps this is the explanation of the 1260, 1290 and 1335 days in Daniel 12; and the otherwise difficult reference to 2300 days in Daniel 8. As suggested in the digression about 'Conditional Prophecy in Daniel', these time periods may have referred to potential periods which had the possibility of extension and reduction- in accordance with the strange mixture of Divine grace, the intercession of Jesus, the prayers of believers, the repentance of Israel… and perhaps other factors. In Daniel's own experience, the 70 years of exile was a period which was extended. "The days" are likened to "the days of Noah" (:37). In the days of Noah again there was the possibility that no flesh would have been saved. The 150 days of flooding is perhaps the basis of Rev. 9:10, where Israel is to have 150 days of tribulation at the hands of her Arab enemies in the last days. The connection between the passages

would therefore seem to be teaching that the final 150 days tribulation will be shortened due to the repentance of the remnant.

No flesh would have been saved- "Saved" here may mean 'delivered'; it will appear that none of us will survive the tribulation, "but for the elects' sake those days shall be shortened" and we will be saved by the second coming. Thus 2 Pet. 3:12,15 reminds us that by our prayers and spiritual development, the days before the second coming will be shortened. If they were not, even the elect would lose their faith (Mt. 24:22)- showing how those of us who are alive at Christ's coming will *barely* survive the spiritual traumas of the last days. The virgins were sleeping when they should have been watching; and Peter says that the righteous in the last generation (see context) will *scarcely* be saved (1 Pet. 4:18). So it would appear that the days of the final tribulation will be shortened, although in another sense the coming of the Lord is delayed in order to allow our greater spiritual development (Mt. 25:5). This 'delay' is why the harvest will be "over-ripe" for reaping (Rev. 14:15 RV)- or is this a reference to the lack of zeal of preachers to Israel in the last days, not harvesting the ready fruit? The Lord likens the final tribulation to the travail of a woman to bring forth her child. But we read in Is. 66:7,8 in this same context of Israel's latter day suffering: "Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing?... for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children". This seems to imply that the expected period of Zion's travail will be cut short, and she will give spiritual birth far quicker than expected. Perhaps the Lord was alluding to this passage when He spoke of how "the days" [of Zion's labour?] shall be shortened.

But for the elect's sake- Both the Lord Jesus and Israel are called "the elect" (Is. 42:1; 45:4); both are fulfilments of the servant songs in Isaiah. 1 Pet. 2:4,6 call Jesus "the elect / chosen" and then the same word is used about the believers being an elect / chosen nation (1 Pet. 2:9). The days will be shortened for the elect's sake- and this may refer to either the Lord Jesus, or the believers in Him; the shortening will be for the sake of *Christ's* intercession, as well as ours. It's tempting to understand "the elect" in the Olivet prophecy as referring to the same group- of faithful believers [or perhaps specifically Jewish ones] who are alive and remain until the Lord's coming. They are the ones who resist the temptation to be deceived in the very last days (:24) and who are snatched away at the Lord's coming "from the four winds", suggesting they are located worldwide (:31). We note that Christ on the cross was called by the same word *eklektos*- "the elect / chosen of God" (Lk. 23:35). This group will indeed have identified with His crucifixion sufferings. Perhaps this is the group of believers who are also specifically called "the elect" who fight on Mount Zion alongside Jesus against the

armies of Israel's enemies (Rev. 17:14). In the immediate context, the elect or chosen ones were perhaps intended by the Lord to refer to the listening disciples. Mk. 13:20 labours the point: "For the elect's sake [*eklektos*], whom He has chosen / elected [*eklegomai*]". The word is specifically used about the Lord's choosing of the twelve (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70; 13:18; 15:16,19; Acts 1:2). He imagined them being scattered to "the four winds" in their obedience to the great commission, but thanks to them, the days would be shortened and they themselves would be gathered to Him at His return. That was the Lord's hope and ideal intention. It didn't happen in the first century, and thus has some element of reapplication in a different context in our last days.

Those days shall be shortened– see on Rom. 9:28,29; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 9:10. This was typified in the Joseph story. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself..." (Gen. 45:1) implies he planned to drag out the process of spiritually refining his brothers, but his love for them caused him to cut it short. "For the elects sake the days shall be shortened" by Christ (Mt. 24:22). The same Hebrew word in Gen. 45:1 is used in Is. 42:14 about how God can no longer refrain Himself in the last days. The RV has: "had been shortened", suggesting that maybe the Lord had already been in dialogue with the Father and secured a decrease in the Father's original time period envisaged.

24:23 *Then if anyone shall say to you*- This again, spoken to the disciples, suggests that they were the ones who would see these things associated with the return of Christ. But they did not. And in any case, all twelve of them were being addressed, and one of them would turn away from Christ. So there was in any case a conditionality attached to the Lord's words.

Here is the Christ, or another, Here is the Christ- do not believe them!- "Lo" [AV] suggests the actual pointing out of a person. "Here… or there" [AV] is poor translation, because the same original word is behind both "here" and "there". The impression is given of people pointing out actual individuals and claiming that 'This is Christ'. The faithful are to flee once the sign is obvious that Christ is about to be revealed, and in those days [and they may literally be days or hours] the world will know that Christ's return is imminent, and therefore all manner of charlatans will start claiming 'It's me!'. The relatively few claims to be Jesus Christ which are made today are hardly credible, no temptation at all for the faithful, and nearly always the person making the claim is mentally ill. But the Olivet prophecy suggests that these claims by false Christs will be so credible that even the faithful will be sorely tempted to believe them. The risk of deception would be so great that the Lord repeatedly warned against it. If there is some worldwide sign that Christ is about to return, perhaps literally in the sky, as "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", then in

those days, such claimants will have far more credibility. It could be that one claimant is particularly persuasive, leading to the final show down on Mount Zion between the true Christ and the anti-Christ, the fake duplicate of Christ.

24:24 *For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, which shall show great signs and wonders*- The Lord is virtually quoting the words of Moses in Dt. 13:1: "When [Heb.; AV "if"] there arise among you a [false] prophet… and gives you a sign or wonder". Even if signs are given, they are not to be believed; apparent miracles are no proof that a man is of God. The Lord is here asserting Himself as the new Moses. The appearance of miraculous "signs" was important in Judaism in order to identify Messiah- hence they asked the Lord to produce such signs (12:38; 16:1; Jn. 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor. 1:22 "the Jews require a sign"). The Lord had refused to respond, even though He had done many miracles. He said that "no sign" would be given to that generation apart from that of Jonah- i.e., His resurrection. It was "a wicked and adulterous generation [that] seeks after a sign" (16:4). The disciples likewise assumed that there was to be such a "sign" predicting the Lord's coming (24:3). On one level it could be argued that the Lord's answer is actually a refusal to give them such a miraculous "sign" from Him; rather did He give them descriptions of what would happen in the world. He had said the same, in essence, to the Jews when they demanded such a miraculous "sign" of Him; He said they would be given no such sign, but rather they were to discern the "signs [s.w.] of the times" (16:3,4). And this effectively is how He answers the disciples when at the beginning of the Olivet prophecy they likewise ask for a "sign". He responds by giving them a list of "signs of the times". However, it would seem from :30 that there will in fact be the "sign" of Messiah visible in the sky- but only in the very last [few?] days before the forcible establishment of His Kingdom. This will be in opposition to the "signs' shown by the false prophets. More detail is given in Rev. 13:13,14; 16:14; 19:20 where we read of the beast system and false prophet doing signs by which they deceived the people in the earth / land. This is an expansion upon the Lord's warning against being deceived by such signs. And the same scenario is found in 2 Thess. 2:9, where we find the man of sin sitting in the latter day temple doing "signs and lying wonders" (same words as here in Mt. 24:24), to be destroyed in the final conflict with the real Christ.

There is ample evidence that in the lead up to the Babylonian invasion which typifies that of the last days, Jeremiah had to work amid considerable opposition from false prophets who mocked his prophecies of impending Arab victory and the need to repent; they will have their counterparts among the ranks of modern Judaism in the last days (Lam. 2:14; Jer. 20:6; 28:1-9; 29:24-26; Zech. 13:2-5). Perhaps it is such false prophets within Israel which our Lord spoke of in Mt. 24:24. But there's no need to speculate too much- when these things come to pass, it will be

crystal clear to those aware of the prophecy that we've now reached that stage. In the A.D.70 possibility of fulfilment, these people operated under the umbrella of fundamentalist Judaism, as they will in the last days. Their false bearing of the Lord's name (Mt. 24:5) alludes back to the pseudo-prophets of Jeremiah's time doing the same (Jer. 14:14). Zedekiah's trauma of being torn between wanting to accept the words of the false prophets whilst inwardly knowing the truth of Jeremiah's words, will perhaps be repeated in the leadership of latter-day Israel, to whom the Elijah ministry will teach the true word of God. The apparent mimicry of Jeremiah's style by the false prophets will perhaps be seen in the last days too.

So as to lead astray- if possible-even the elect- The possibility of deception may be precluded by the fact that the elect, by reason of being the elect, will not be deceived. But there may also be the suggestion that it is impossible to deceive the elect because they are preserved from such deception. The Father and Son are willing and able to "keep you from falling" by sealing or preserving the faithful from such deception. The element of God's work over and above human freewill effort is itself indicated by the very term "the elect"; those chosen, by God and not of themselves.

A major theme of the prophecy is the danger of being deceived (:4,5,11). As observed under :23 *Look, here is the Christ or here*, the need for this urgent warning requires that the claimants have far more credibility than such persons have today.

24:25 *Listen, I have told you beforehand-* The intention of prophecy is that when it is fulfilled, then all is clear to the believers and they are thereby guided and strengthened. This will be particularly true in those last few days when the sign of the Son of Man is in the sky (:30), everyone somehow knows Christ is about to come- and inevitably false claimants will arise, perhaps one particular one will claim to be Christ and will go to battle against the real Christ. Hence the repetition of the Lord's warning about not being deceived by this person or related claims.

24:26 *Therefore, if they shall say to you-* This appears to be a laboured repetition of the warning in :23- see notes there. The Lord is really underlining the possibility of deception by false claims to be Him in the very last days of the tribulation. He will not be hidden "in" anything nor anywhere- His coming will be as clear as lightning.

Look, he is in the wilderness! Do not go- These are the identical Greek words as used about how the people of Jerusalem 'went forth' into the 'desert' to see John the Baptist (11:7 "what *went you out* into the *desert* to see"; 3:1), and how the crowds went out to see the Lord Himself in the "desert place" (14:13,15). It will not be a question of going forth to see Jesus, as it had been until recently in the Lord's ministry.

Now it will be too late for that- His coming will be evident to all. Yet the Lord has introduced the Olivet prophecy by saying that the house of the temple has been left unto them "desolate", the same word translated "desert" (23:38). He may be saying that any idea that He has appeared lurking around the desolated temple area will likewise be false; He will not be in any "secret chamber" of that temple. This would explain the parallel between "desert" and "secret chamber". Do not "go forth" uses the same word as the Lord goes on to use in :27- His coming will be as the lightning 'goes forth'. They will not go to Him, He will come to them. But He is talking here concerning the unbelievers. The faithful will have already 'fled', and I have suggested that their dropping all things, even their jackets, to respond to that call is nothing less than their response to the news that 'He's back'. The same word translated "go forth" is used in 25:1,6 about the need to "go forth" and meet Him, and how the unfaithful amongst the ecclesia will delay in response to that call. Again, Revelation provides more detail, using the same word to describe the latter day call to 'go forth out of' Babylon or else they will be destroyed along with her (Rev. 18:4).

Look, he is in the inner chambers! Do not believe it- Seeing they were sitting near the temple, the reference would contextually have been to the chambers of the temple; see on *In the desert*.

24:27 *For as the lightning comes from the east and is seen even to the west*- This is the "lightning" and earthquake associated with the return of Christ when His people, natural and spiritual, are at the nadir of persecution and tribulation (Rev. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Lightning doesn't do as described here. The reference is therefore to the Old Testament manifestation of lightning as part of the Cherubim, which flashed with lightning (Ez. 1:4,14). Ezekiel saw the Cherubim depart from the temple (24:1 has alluded to this already), go Eastward to the mount of Olives and then mount up to Heaven (Ez. 10 :19; 11 :22,23). This is why "the Glory", the lightning of the Cherubim chariot, was seen as returning to the Mount of Olives "by the way of the east" into the temple (Ez. 43:2-4).

The Lord had earlier used these very same words in Lk. 17:20-24: "The Kingdom of God comes not with observation [it wouldn't be as if a series of signs were fulfilled and people could see the Kingdom of God inching nearer over the decades]. Nor shall they say 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' [this is Mt. 24:23 " 'Look here!' or 'Look there!'"]. For the Kingdom of God [a title of Messiah] is amongst you... They shall say to you [in the final tribulation], 'See here' or 'See there' [this again is Mt. 24:23,26]; go not after them, nor follow them [Mt. 24:26 "Go not forth... believe it not"]. For as the lightning that lightens out of the one part of Heaven and shines unto the other part under Heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in His day... they shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man". The

connection would suggest that as the Lord stood amongst them, He was the Son of Man in His day. Those who accepted Him as Messiah were accepting His 'coming' to them. For those who did not, and who argued about whether or not He fulfilled all the prophecies they were analysing ["with observation"], He would 'come' unmistakably, but in judgment.

So shall the coming of the Son of Man be- No more doubt can be allowed that the *parousia* is visible and not invisible. The Lord is here specifically warning against any idea that His *parousia* is somehow invisible. Jehovah's pseudo-Witnesses and preterists need to take this far more seriously. The point must be driven home that *parousia* always refers to the physical presence of a person. There is another Greek word frequently translated 'coming' which is more flexible in meaning, but *parousia* means 'a literal being alongside', and is always used in that way:-
- "As the lightning cometh out of the east... so shall also the *coming* (*parousia*) of the son of man be" (Mt. 24:27).
- "The day that Noe entered into the ark... the flood came... so shall also the coming of the son of man be" (:38,39).

24:28 *Wherever the carcase is*- This whole verse has various possible interpretations which each seem to me to have things to commend them and yet also their own problems. The key word is "For". This verse is an expansion upon the Lord's teaching that His coming will be visible, will be as the lightning of judgment upon those who have not "gone forth" to Him, and no credence should be given to any claims He has come invisibly. The Lord may be likening His coming to the coming down from the sky of eagles upon the carcase- of Israel. This could have had an AD70 fulfilment in the 'eagles' of the Roman legions, just as Yahweh's Old Testament 'comings' in judgment upon Israel were at the hands of the Babylonian and Assyrian armies. But the final coming of Divine judgment will be in the literal, personal coming of God's Son to earth in judgment. The same Greek word translated "where" is found in Mk. 13:14- the abomination of desolation will stand "*where* it ought not". It could be that this location on the temple mount is what the Lord has in view. This is where He will come down in judgment. Upon the very location He was then standing upon with the disciples, the pride and glory of an apostate Judaism. It was already no more than a carcase in God's eyes. The temple was "where [s.w.] the Jews always resort" (Jn. 18:20). The carcase or dead body may not necessarily refer to Israel. If we take Rev. 11:8,9 as an expansion of the Olivet prophecy, we find the same Greek word used about the dead bodies of the faithful remnant who share their Lord's death in Jerusalem and lay exposed for three days- perhaps literal days. The metaphor of the eagles coming speaks of Divine judgment from Heaven, ultimately in the personal coming of Christ to earth. In this case, the eagles would come because of the dead bodies / carcase of those who had died the death of Christ in Jerusalem in the final tribulation. The

Greek word for "carcase", *ptoma*, literally means 'a fallen one', and is from the verb *pipto*, to fall. And this word is used about the fall of Jerusalem- also in Revelation 11. The city "fell" (Rev. 11:13), just as Jerusalem was to "fall by the edge of the sword" (Lk. 21:24).

It's possible that the Lord intended us to understand the carcase as Jerusalem, and the vultures as the latter day invaders of Israel (Jer. 4:13). Or it has been suggested by Harry Whittaker that "If you (my disciples) show yourselves to be spiritually a carcase (as in Rev. 3:1), you will certainly find yourselves the prey of these "vultures," the false teachers". The question is similar to that in Lk. 17:37, where this is said is in answer to the question: "Where, Lord?". This may not necessarily mean '*to* where'. That the Roman invasion of AD67-70 was a detailed fulfilment of some parts of the Mosaic prophecies of curses for disobedience is well known and chronicled. Our Lord's quotation of Dt. 28:26 in here in :28 ("your carcases shall be meat unto the fowls of the air") is confirmation of this.

There will the eagles gather together- I suggested under *For where the carcase is* that this may refer to the coming of Christ down from Heaven in judgment upon either the carcase of Israel, or for the sake of the carcases of the slain believers. The Greek for "eagle", *aetos*, literally means 'one of the air [*aer*]', and *aer* is used of how the Lord Jesus will come in the "air" [*aer*] with the faithful in judgment (1 Thess. 4:17- note that this part of 1 Thessalonians is full of allusion to the Olivet prophecy). This would be the pouring out of the seventh vial into "the air" [*aer*], when finally "It is done" (Rev. 16:17).

The Lord's usage of similar language in Lk. 17:37 must, however, be given its due weight. There the Lord speaks of the gathering of the eagles in terms of explaining how His people will be gathered to Him and judgment. The same word for 'gather' is used repeatedly for the gathering of the faithful in the last days (3:12; 13:30; 25:26,32; Jn. 15:6). Most notably, we find it used in 1 Thess. 4:14, comforting the believers that God will at the last day 'gather' the dead believers at the last day (AV "will God *bring* with Him"). This will be the "gathering together unto Him" (2 Thess. 2:1 s.w.). This is all impressive evidence that the language of 'gathering' is used about the gathering of the believers to Christ at His coming, and according to 1 Thess. 4:16,17 this will involve a literal being snatched away [from persecution, according to the Olivet prophecy]. Just as the believers will be led / gathered to human judgment seats (Mk. 13:11, *ago*), gathered / lead / brought [*ago*] before human kings (Lk. 21:12), so they will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ the King [*sun-ago*].

The Lord responds to the question about how we will get to judgment by saying that eagles fly to where the body is. It's possible to interpret

eagles as Angels- e.g. Rev. 8:13 speaks of an Angel flying through the sky in the last day, crying 'woe'- the Greek *ouai* would've been understood as an imitation of the noise an eagle makes. And there are other links between Rev. 8 and Mt. 24. So perhaps the Lord's answer was that we are not to worry about getting there, as our Angels will take us to judgment. Zech. 14:5 speaks of the coming of the Lord Jesus "and all the holy ones with him". But it is applied to the believers in 1 Thess. 3:13 and to the Angels in 2 Thess. 1:7. In this sense, the believers come with their Angels to judgment; but because the process happens in a moment of time, it appears that in fact Jesus returns with the faithful. This is why elsewhere the Lord Jesus is described as returning both with Angels (Mt. 16:27; 25:31; Lk. 9:26) and with the saints (Rev. 19:14 cp. 17:14).

One of the well known shames of crucifixion was that the body was pecked by birds, even before death occurred. The idea of an uncovered body attracting birds (i.e. the believers) would have been readily understood as a crucifixion allusion. Whilst this may seem an inappropriate symbol, it wouldn't be the only time the Bible uses language which we may deem unfitting. Consider how Ps. 78:65,66 likens God to a drunk man awakening and flailing out at His enemies, striking them in the private parts. I always have to adjust my specs and read this again before I can really accept that this is what it says. So in Mt. 24:28, the Lord seems to be responding to the disciples' query about the physicalities of the future judgment by saying that in reality, His crucifixion would in essence be their judgment, and this is what they should rather concern themselves with. They would gather together unto it and through this know the verdict upon them, all quite naturally, as eagles are gathered by natural instinct to the carcass. The thief on the cross wanted the Lord to remember him for good at judgment day. Yet He replied that He could tell him today, right now, the result of the judgment- the thief would be accepted. It's as if the Lord even in that agony of mind and body… realized keenly that He, there, that fateful afternoon, was sitting in essence on the judgment throne. And for us too, the Lord on Calvary is our constant and insistent judge. It could even be that when the Lord told the Sanhedrin that they would see the son of man coming in judgment (Mk. 14:62), He was referring to the cross. For how will they exactly see Him coming in judgment at the last day?

24:29 *But immediately after the tribulation of those days*- The phrase *eutheos meta* doesn't necessarily have to mean 'and then, after that', in a chronological sense (although it can mean that). It could refer to things going on at the same time, *meta* the tribulation. The tribulation is that spoken of in :21 "Then shall be great tribulation". Verses 22-28 are therefore a parenthesis, developing the theme that false Christs shall appear, but we should not be taken in by them because the Lord's coming will be literally visible and crystal clear to all. The "tribulation" will be "immediately" followed by the Lord's return. Yet the "tribulation" of :21

was clearly initially relevant to the destruction of the temple in AD70. There was a rescheduling of the Divine program, just as has happened so often in prophetic history, not least in the promised restoration of the Kingdom not happening after the 70 years in Babylon.

“The tribulation” is explained in Luke’s record as being Jerusalem being “trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Lk. 21:24). After this, in Luke’s record, there are the signs in sun, moon and stars which Matthew’s record also describes- as coming “immediately *meta* the tribulation”. The "times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24) appear to refer to the time of Gentile domination of Jerusalem, and yet it is reapplied to refer to the time of Gentile opportunity to learn the Gospel, according to how Paul alludes to it in Rom. 11:25. And yet the application to Jerusalem’s tribulation may remain true ultimately, in the very last days. For the allusion is to Zech. 12:3:"In that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people (i.e. all around Israel, as this often means): all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it". The Septuagint renders the first phrase as "a stone trodden down by the Gentiles", clearly alluded to by Jesus in His description of Jerusalem being captured by the Gentiles (Lk. 21:24). Those who are 'gathered together' against Jerusalem must be the Arabs, according to the Zechariah context. The rejected likewise will be burdened with a heavy stone (Mt. 18:6), showing that they will share the judgments of Israel's enemies. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" for three and a half years, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 'Jebus', the old name for Jerusalem, means 'downtrodden'. This hints that the liberation of Jebus at the beginning of David's reign was seen by Christ as typical of the time when He would liberate Jerusalem from downtreading, at his return. This suggests that the times of Gentile domination of Jerusalem are to be ended by the establishment of the Kingdom at Christ's second coming; we are yet to see, therefore, a Gentile domination of Jerusalem before Christ's coming.

The Lord predicted that the final tribulation- which He says is that prophesied in Daniel- would be followed “immediately” by His return. The evil man who places the desolating abomination meets his end in war (Dan. 11:45)- just as the same individual does in Daniel 8:23. And this leads in to the resurrection and judgment at the Lord’s return (Dan. 12:1,2). So the Lord’s own interpretation of Daniel 11 leaves us with no doubt that the whole section about the abomination and the individual responsible for it applies to our last days. Any partial fulfilment it may have had in Antiochus Epiphanes, Nero or Titus only makes those men prototypes of the final abuser yet to come.

It is at this time, *after* the fall of Jerusalem, that we read of "the sea and the waves roaring" (Lk. 21:25). There are many prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel of Babylon being at war with the Arab nations who supported her in the attack on Jerusalem, e.g. concerning Ammon (Ez. 21:20) and Tyre (Ez. 26:7). Ammon is mentioned as *escaping* out of the hand of the king of the North during his invasion of Israel and Jerusalem (Dan. 11:41). This shows that there will be much inter-semitic conflict both before and during Israel's prolonged desolation period. "The sea and the waves roaring" at the time of Israel's final suffering (Lk. 21:25) is a figure taken from Jer. 49:23 concerning the nations around Israel being like the troubled sea in their fighting with each other. However, the outstanding conflicts will be temporarily forgotten in the last days to concentrate on a combined push against Jerusalem. But once this is captured, the old rivalries will suddenly violently surface, which is how God will destroy the invaders and save the righteous remnant who are still barely alive in the sewers and basements of Jerusalem. It seems that the beasts of Dan. 7 are only different aspects of the one great beast which finally emerges. Daniel sees them all come up together after the waves of the sea are troubled (Dan. 7:3), connecting with the Lord's description of the last day powers around Israel in the same way (Lk. 21:25).

The sun shall be darkened- After the tribulation, as it was when Jesus died (Lk. 23:45 s.w.). Israel's tribulation will make them understand what He went through. The context has been the Lord's insistence that His coming will be obviously visible, like lightening in the sky, and the reference to "the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven" / the sky (:30) would suggest that a literal sign in the sky is what the Lord has in mind. The allusion to the crucifixion would also require a literal element of fulfilment. The additional information given in Rev. 8:12; 9:2 suggests that this darkening of sun and stars happens progressively, although that may be over a period of only a few literal days. There are reports of such signs being seen over Jerusalem in the lead up to AD70, the appearance of comets etc. However it seems to me that Josephus had access to the Olivet prophecy and some of the wording of his historical claims is so similar to the Lord's words that I personally doubt the degree of real fulfilment that was going on; rather do I suspect he was consciously alluding to the Lord's words and wishing to see them fulfilled in the history he was recording. That is not the same thing as AD70 actually fulfilling in detail the Olivet prophecy.

The sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light- Joseph's dream clearly identifies these symbols as representing Israel. The passages which make this same identification are many: Gen. 37:9,10; 15:5; 22:17; Amos 8:8-10; Micah 3:6; Song of Solomon 6:10; Is. 24:23; Jer. 33:20-26; JoeI 2:10,30-32; 3:15; Acts 2:20; Rev. 6:12;

8:12; 12:1. Jer. 31:35,36 is likely the Old Testament passage the Lord specifically had in mind: "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divides the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is his name. If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever". Only here do we find "sun, moon, and stars" combined with "sea and waves roaring" as in the Olivet prophecy in Luke 21. In Luke He spoke of "On the earth distress of *nations* (Gentile nations causing distress in the earth / land of Israel) with perplexity… men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth (or land, of Israel)". The Greek word translated "perplexity" is used in the LXX concerning the final tribulation of Israel (Lev. 26:16; Dt. 28:22; Is. 5:30; 8:20 LXX).

"Immediately after the tribulation... shall all the tribes of the earth (land-of Israel) mourn, and then shall they see the Son of Man coming" (:29,30) is followed immediately by the fig tree parable. The chronology seems clear- a tribulation, repentance of Israel (note the allusions to the mourning of Zech.12 and 13), and then the second coming, with the fig tree parable about the repentance of Israel added as a footnote to this part of the prophecy.

And the stars shall fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken- The Greek phrase is used only elsewhere in Rev. 6:13. This vision is clearly an expansion upon the Olivet prophecy. There, the stars fall "as a fig tree casts her unripe figs". This too is the language of the Olivet prophecy (24:32). The lack of spiritual maturity in Israel is related to the stars [of Israel- see on *Sun... moon... stars*] falling. The appearance of comets would certainly give the impression of falling stars, and I suggest that the main fulfilment will be in terms of things visibly seen in the sky, as hard proof to all the world that the Lord Jesus is returning.

The events of judgment day will be a 'shaking' of the world, including the faithful (Lk. 6:48 the house built on the rock could not be "shaken", s.w.). Heb. 12:26,27 surely allude here, saying that just as the earth shook when the old covenant was instituted, so the "heavens" would also be shaken. The suggestion of the context is that this day of shaking both heaven and earth was almost upon the readership- who were Hebrews, Jewish Christians.

24:30 *And then the sign of the Son of Man shall appear in heaven*- Matthew began his Gospel with the same word and idea, speaking of the 'appearance' of the star which heralded the coming of the Son of Man (2:7). The Lord has just used the same word in speaking of how His coming would be as the lightning shines or appears in the sky (:27). This,

along with the allusion to the star seen by the wise men, encourage us to think of this final "sign of the Son of Man" as a literal appearance in the sky, strengthening our suggestion that the signs in the sun, moon and stars in :29 are likewise to be interpreted literally. Jn. 1:5 perhaps puts all this in more spiritual terms by likening the Lord to a light shining [s.w. "appear"] in Jewish darkness, unperceived. Now is the day to perceive Him as He is, rather than too late at His return. These signs of the Lord's return will be in the sky for the world; the faithful will have already dropped all and fled, to Him, knowing He has come. How they will be called to go forth to meet Him isn't altogether clear, although 2 Pet. 1:19 uses the same word translated "appear" in speaking of how when the day of His coming dawns, i.e. begins, the day star will arise shining brightly in our hearts.

As noted earlier, it was exactly such a visible sign that the disciples and the Jews wanted in order to know Jesus was Messiah and that He had returned (see on :23). The Lord had explained at least twice that no such sign would be given. But now He is saying that all too late, such a sign would be given. For now, we are to believe without such signs written up in the sky. If "the sign of the son of man" which appears over Israel and leads the tribes of Israel to mourn in repentance is a literal vision of the Angel-cherubim, then this has a basis in Jacob seeing the Angelic vision in the time of his distress.

Then all the tribes of the earth- "Tribes", *phule*, is used exclusively of the tribes of Israel, until the references in Revelation to people of all nations, tribes and languages having representatives who were redeemed, being under the power of the beast etc. Even those references could be understood as referring to the tribes of Israel, along with the nations of the Gentile world. But "the earth" often refers to the land, of Israel. And the idea of tribes mourning is clearly referring to the prophecy of Zech. 12:10-14 that the tribes of Israel will mourn when they see the once crucified Christ, still with the marks in His body testifying to His crucifixion. Rev. 1:7 uses the same language. Israel will finally all repent when they see the sign of the Son of Man- and then, He will return literally and visibly in the clouds. The call of John the Baptist and the Lord's own preachers had been for Israel to "mourn" in repentance (11:17). This they had not done as intended, but they shall do so at His actual return. They who had laughed in this life will mourn then in rejection (Lk. 6:25; James 4:9); their repentance will be too late. Another possibility is that the impenitent amongst Israel will die in the final tribulation as outlined in Zech. 14, and these who mourn are those who repent and are accepted; for Zech. 12:14 adds the detail that the tribes who mourn will be those "that remain", who are [so the Hebrew means] 'the remnant'. But see below on *They shall see.*

Shall mourn, and they shall see- A play on words in the Greek: *kopsontai... opsontai* . The intention of this paronomasia is that Israel's repentant mourning is directly related to their seeing Him in the sense that His visible return only happens once they repent. When "all the tribes of the earth / land mourn [in repentance]… then shall they see the Son of man coming". Some in Israel must repent before Christ returns. The Lord refers to this in speaking to the Jews who crucified Him: "You shall see [s.w.] the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of Heaven" (26:64). They would see that all too late, as part of the process of their condemnation- to realize it was all true, and it is too late to do anything about it. This is why the pronouns change from "they" here to "you" when talking again to the faithful disciples in :33. The Lord had earlier used the same idea, in saying that that group would only "see" Him again when they said "Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Lk. 13:35). They would see that and say that all too late. The Lord's words clearly suggest they of that generation would see His return in glory. But His coming was delayed, and they did not. But they will at the last day, for they will be resurrected to face judgment and condemnation. The chronological issues need not worry us too much- i.e. when will they be resurrected, at precisely what point on the timeline of these events. The meaning of time will surely be collapsed around the Lord's return. This will be the final fulfilment of the prophecy that they shall look upon Him whom they pierced and mourn (Rev. 1:7; Jn. 19:37; "look" is s.w. "see" here in Mt. 24:30). The invitation of course is to look upon the crucified Christ now and mourn in repentance; for we shall have to do this one way or the other, either now in repentance, or too late in condemnation.

The foolish virgins want to go to buy oil; they make a foolish excuse, seeing the shops were evidently shut. These are those who mourn and wail when they see the sign of the Son of Man (Mt. 24:30,31 cp. Rev. 1:7). They want to hide from Him, as Adam and the rejected of Rev. 6:16. Then they compose themselves and go to meet Him, persuading themselves that they will be accepted by Him (because later they are surprised).

The Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven - Dan. 7:14. The language of clouds and then Angels (:31) is reminiscent of the Lord's ascension, at which the Angels promised His return "in like manner"; and the same language is used of His return in Acts 1:7. This precludes any invisible 'coming' in AD70. Rather than thinking that the Lord somehow 'came' in AD70 in some metaphorical manner, I would suggest that the literal language is such that we can only conclude that His literal return has been delayed. Otherwise we end up forcing the obviously literal into the metaphorical.

The moment of the second coming (:27 *parousia*) is likened to a flash of lightning and the beginning of rain at the time of Noah's flood. This

makes any application of *parousia* to the prolonged series of events in A.D. 69/70 at least tenuous when compared to the obvious application to the moment of the second coming. There are many links between Mt. 24,25 and 1 Thess. 4,5 which have been tabulated by several expositors. According to these connections, the Lord's 'parousia' mentioned in Mt. 24 is interpreted by Paul as referring to the literal second coming (Mt. 24:30,31 = 1 Thess. 4:15,16). In view of all this, it is desirable to interpret the 'coming' of the Lord in Mt. 24 as referring to the literal presence of Christ at His return, although this is not to rule out any primary reference to the events of A.D. 70. Indeed I would argue that since *parousia* means a literal presence, it's not the case that the prophecy received a primary fulfilment in AD70; rather is it that the literal return of Christ was intended then, but was rescheduled. At best, the *parousia* element of the predictions had no partial fulfilment in AD70. The flow of the prophecy is indicated by the repetition of words like "then" : "*Then* shall they deliver you up... *then* shall many be offended... *then* shall the end come... *then* let them which be in Judea... *then* shall be great tribulation... *then* if any man shall say unto you, Here is Christ... *immediately after the tribulation of those days* ("in *those days*, after that tribulation", Mk. 13:24)... *then* shall appear the sign of the Son of man... *then* shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the son of man coming" (Mt. 24). There is no suggestion here of any break in application, from AD70 to the last days. If the reference to Christ coming in glory with the Angels is accepted as referring to the last days, but the earlier verses of the prophecy to AD70 alone, we have to find the point where Christ breaks from AD70 to the last days. And I would suggest such a point cannot be found.

"In the clouds" clearly alludes to His ascension in clouds, and the promise that He would return "in like manner" (Acts 1:11), presumably meaning in clouds to the same Mount of Olives. Again we are invited to understand these as literal clouds, just as the signs in the heavenly bodies of :29 are likewise to be understood. At His coming, the figurative will pass away and planet earth and those who dwell upon it will be faced with the ultimate reality- the personal, literal coming of God's Son to earth.

With power and great glory- The very words used by the Lord in the model prayer of 6:13 concerning the power and glory of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Lord to establish the Kingdom is clearly yet future and did not occur in AD70. This is the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory [s.w.] of His Father with His angels, and then shall He repay every man according to his deeds" (16:27; 25:31). Likewise, this is "the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory [s.w.], [and] you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (19:28). Such a judgment and coming with Angels never occurred in AD70. John's equivalent of this is to emphasize that in essence, the believers behold Christ's glory now, insofar as they perceive

the wonder and moral pinnacle of His achievement for us on the cross (Jn. 17:24). Col. 3:4 teaches that "When Christ who is our life [i.e. our basis of resurrection] shall appear, then shall [we] also appear with Him in glory". His coming in glory will be ours, in that we will have been snatched away to meet with Him and will come with Him to Zion. And yet the next verse speaks as if now, at this point, the Angels are sent to gather the elect. But these chronological discrepancies are no real issue for the believer if we accept that the meaning of time must be changed around the time of Christ's coming, as must the meaning of space [if Einstein's theory of relativity is correct]. This would explain all practical concerns about space and time issues relating to the day of judgment. Another window on the apparent chronological discrepancies is the consideration that there are various possible potential scenarios, which will work out according to the speed and nature of the spiritual response of both natural and spiritual Israel.

24:31 *And he shall send forth his angels*- The preachers of His Gospel are His messengers / 'angels' reaping in the harvest and proclaiming God's victory. And yet these are the very things which the Angels are described as doing in the last day (Mk. 13:27; Rev. 14:6-14). Yet we are doing it right now. In the preaching of the Gospel, we are sharing with the Angels in their work. We're in tandem with them. The nature of our response to the Gospel when we hear it in this life is essentially our response to the call to judgment at the last day. The very same Greek words translated "Send… Angels" are to be found in the description of John the Baptist being sent to gather men to the Lord Jesus: "I send My messenger before Your face" (Mt. 11:10). The idea is clearly that those who had responded to John's message of repentance and faith in Christ's forgiveness have in essence already been gathered for the Kingdom. And yet Israel generally had stoned those sent [s.w.] unto them (23:37- the Lord said this introducing the Olivet prophecy).

With a great sound of a trumpet- The trumpet associated with the Lord's second coming in Rev. 11:15? The trumpet associated with our change to immortality in 1 Cor. 15:52, "the trump of God" associated with the resurrection and gathering in 1 Thess. 4:16.

And they shall gather together his elect- Alluded to in 2 Thess. 2:1 "our gathering together unto Him". However, a case can be made that the believers are already with Christ when He comes in the clouds. Therefore the "elect" could possibly refer specifically to natural Israel rather than the believers. If the reference is to the believers, this creates a chronological issue- although see on 24:30 *Power and great glory*. The Angels will be sent out to gather together the elect, but Angels will also be 'sent forth' to "gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (13:41). It seems that this 'gathering out' will be achieved by the more positive 'gathering together' of the faithful. The

point of gathering is the point of division between good and bad; our response to the certain news that 'He's back' will decide the outcome of our judgment. Those wise virgins who go forth to meet Christ immediately are therefore those who will be "caught up together" with the faithful believers who will have been resurrected. Just as eagles mount up into the air and come down where the carcass is, so we will come to judgment. This will be when the Angels "gather together *his elect*" (Mt. 24:31). They then "meet the Lord in the air" literally, perhaps connecting with Rev. 11:12: "They (the faithful, persecuted saints of the last days) heard a great voice from heaven (cp. "the voice" of 1 Thess. 4:16) saying unto them, Come up (cp. "caught up...") hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud (cp. "caught up... in clouds"); and their enemies beheld them". It may well be that Rev. 11:12 is speaking of the faithful Jewish remnant of the last days, who will be snatched away along with us.

From the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other- "To the uttermost part of heaven" (Mk. 13:27). Is this a reference to the believers being "caught away in clouds, into the air, for the purpose of meeting the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17)? It seems also an allusion to the lightning of :27. The Lord's coming and His gathering of the elect is all in the same moment; and yet there are apparently various things which must occur all at the same time. The apparent contradictions in chronology need not worry us- see on :31 *Power and great glory*.

24:32 *Now from the fig tree learn her parable*- Lk. 13:6-9 records another parable of the fig tree, upon which that in the Olivet prophecy is based. Jesus, the dresser of God's vineyard of Israel, came seeking spiritual fruit on the fig tree, for the three years of his ministry. Because of the lack of it, the tree was cut down. Christ said "Now (i.e. towards the end of the tribulation period?) learn a parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). It is tempting to read this as effectively meaning 'Now learn *the* parable of the fig tree', seeing that the parable of the Olivet prophecy is so similar to the previous fig tree parable.

When her branch has become tender- The obvious connection in Jewish minds would be with Messiah as the pre-eminent branch of Israel (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Ez. 17:22; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Lk. 21 adds the detail that we are to look also at "all the trees". A tender branch, all the trees, the Kingdom of God- these are all themes to be found in Ez. 17:22-24: "Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar [the dynasty of the house of David], and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it [the return of Christ to Mount Zion?]; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell [this is

the picture of Christ's Kingdom- Mk. 4:32]. All the trees [cp. "the fig tree and all the trees"] of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it". This last verse was clearly in the Lord's mind as He was led out to Golgotha (Lk. 23:31). This clearly Messianic language is associated by the Lord with the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. The fig tree has to identify with Him as Messiah, become itself the tender branch, before fruit can be seen upon it.

I mentioned earlier in this exposition the strong parallels between the Olivet prophecy and the upper room discourse. The equivalent of the fig tree parable is in Jn. 15:1-6: "I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned". Rom. 11:19 in turn alludes here by associating the cut off, rejected branches with natural Israel. The branches are the tree, which is Christ. That same identification of the branch and Christ is made here in Mt. 24:32. Putting together these teachings, the implication would be that for the branches of Israel to again be fruitful, they must be grafted back in, seeing they have been cut off. And that is the very teaching of Romans 11. "When his branch is yet…" is an attempt to translate a difficult original text. The idea may be 'If, so long as… the branch is tender, it can yield fruit'. The broken off branches must be grafted back in and only 'so long as' that is the case, they can bear fruit. In the first century context, the Lord may be urging Israel to bring forth spiritual fruit- whilst the branch is still tender, whilst it was still connected to the tree, and had not been broken off and burnt as Romans 11 envisaged happening. And yet Israel would not. Hence the Lord's appeal to His listeners to *learn* this parable. And hence the manner in which He placed this teaching as the conclusion to the Olivet prophecy, because Israel's repentance is the key precondition in His return. Jn. 15 is saying the same thing by warning that once severed from Christ, then there would be no chance of bearing fruit.

And puts forth its leaves- The fig tree was to "shoot forth" (Lk. 21:30) or 'germinate' (Young), witnessed by its putting forth of leaves (Mk. 13:28) and tender branches (Mt. 24:32). When the fig tree puts forth leaves there are often immature, unripe figs amongst them. Thus Jesus inspected the fig tree outside Jerusalem to see if it had any fruit, and cursed it because it did not. It had "leaves only" (Mt. 21:19), but now the

Lord seems to be saying that the presence of leaves will be a sign of His return. The obvious point of connection with 21:19 would suggest that He becomes more and more acceptant of *any* sign of spirituality and response in Israel; rather like the parable of the great supper features an increasing desperation on the part of the King to accept anyone who is willing to say "yes" to the invitation. "The time of *figs* was not yet", i.e. it was not reasonable to find fully developed fruit on it. The fig tree referred to the nation of Israel; Jesus expected to find at least the beginnings of some spiritual fruit, but due to the chronic dearth of response to his message, Jesus cursed the nation and dried it up (Mk. 11:13,14,20). This would lead us to interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing. It may well be that the whole of the Olivet prophecy has reference to a final three and a half year tribulation of the believers just prior to the second coming, and that during this time there will be a period of zealous witnessing to both Jews and Gentiles. This fits into place with the fig tree parable; this preaching starts to produce some degree of response from Israel, and then "all (is) fulfilled" in the full manifestation of Christ's Kingdom. The parable says that as surely as Summer follows Spring, so those who see the blossoming of the fig tree in the parable, will see the Kingdom. Maybe this is to be taken literally; there may be a literal gap of a few weeks/months (as between Spring and Summer) between the first signs of Jewish repentance, and all being fulfilled. It may well be that the "all" which will be fulfilled in Lk. 21:32 is to be equated with "the times of the Gentiles" being fulfilled (Lk. 21:24). The Greek *kairos* translated "times" is also translated "opportunity"; the Gentiles' opportunity to hear the Gospel is fast running out. There will be a call to Israel to repent in the last days, and a remnant will respond. This Elijah ministry [and maybe our present witness to Jewry prepares the way for this?] must occur "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord". We could interpret the putting forth of leaves on the fig tree as the signs of an initial repentance and indication that real spiritual fruit is developing.

You know- Lk. 21 "you know in your own selves". Seeing the repentance of Israel will lead to the faithful perceiving that the end is near. This perhaps alludes to the same idea as in 2 Pet. 1:19, that the day star shall arise in the hearts of the believers just before the Lord comes.

That the summer is near- One way to look at this is that summer stood for harvest, obviously so in this context of fruit on a fig tree. But harvest was clearly a metaphor for judgment upon Israel, which is the context and burden of the Olivet prophecy. The Lord has lamented that the fig tree of Israel has nothing but leaves- and because of that, He had uttered judgment upon her (21:19,20). So the Lord could be simply repeating this is parabolic terms. The judgment / harvest / Summer was to come upon

the fig tree whilst she had only leaves [and not fruit] on her tender branch. And yet the language of 'shooting forth' [Gk. germinating] in Lk. 21:30 suggests that more than mere leaves are in view. Summer will only come once there is fruit to harvest. That seems the point.

The shooting forth of the fig tree is given as the special sign that the Lord will return (Lk. 21:30). This must be understood in the context of the Lord coming to the fig tree in Mk. 11; He sought for at least the beginnings of fruit shooting forth, but found only leaves. And therefore He cursed the fig tree. He evidently saw the shooting forth of the fig tree as a figure of Israel's acceptance of Him, however immaturely. Likewise the parable of Lk. 13:6-9 makes the same connection between fruit on the fig tree and repentance within Israel. "Learn a (the) parable of the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32) may suggest that we are to understand the fig tree parable in the light of these other fig tree parables. And there are several OT links between fruit on the fig and spiritual fruit in Israel (Mic. 7:1 cp. Mt. 7:15,16; Hos. 9:10; Hab. 3:17,18). When the branch of Israel "is now become tender", i.e. immediately this happens, we are to know that the eternal Summer of God's Kingdom is nigh (Mt. 24:32 RV). The tenderness of the branch is surely to be connected with the hard heart of Israel becoming tender through their acceptance of Jesus and the new covenant. When we see just the beginnings of Israel's repentance, through a remnant responding, we are to know that "He is near, even at the doors" (Mt. 24:33 RV). All this evidence steers us away from the idea that the fig tree became tender through the re-establishment of the nation of Israel- and towards an understanding that this is all about Israel's repentance.

24:33 *Even so you also, when you see all these things*- The structure of the argument suggests that "these things" specifically refers to the shooting forth of the fig tree:

Mt. 24:32	Mt. 24:33
When [Gk. *hotan*]	When [Gk. *hotan*]
His branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves	You see all these things
You know [Gk. *ginosko*]	You know [Gk. *ginosko*]
That summer is near [Gk. *eggus*]	That it is near [Gk. *eggus*]; Lk. 21:32 "That the Kingdom of God is near [Gk. *eggus*]".

The "Summer" meant 'harvest', and that was a metaphor for judgment. Verse 33 parallels this by saying that "it" is near. The "it" may well refer to the destruction of the temple, which is the context of the whole discussion; although Lk. 21:32 supplies "the Kingdom of God". The Lord is bringing the discourse to a close by returning to the question which provoked it: "When shall these things be?". And He appears to be saying in the first century context that so long as only leaves remained on the fig

tree of Israel, then the Summer of harvest judgment upon her was going to come. And yet the Lord here is using language with two or more meanings, as Scripture often does. In the latter day context, He seems to be saying that once spiritual fruit is beginning on the Israel fig tree, then this is the ultimate sign that the ultimate end is near.

Know that he is near- at the doors- The idea of Christ at the door is repeated by the Lord Himself in Rev. 3:19,20- where it means that Jesus is asking others to repent and turn to Him. Opening the door means the Lord has granted forgiveness- His being at the door implies surely that He is asking for repentance. *Epi* the doors can carry the sense of 'about' or 'upon', perhaps an allusion to the Angels of Passover night, which is such a strong type of the second coming. That would explain the plural "doors". I suggested that Summer / harvest may refer to judgment; being 'upon the doors' may likewise suggest the Angel of Death in judgment. This would certainly fit the first century interpretation offered above- that while only leaves are on the fig tree branch, whilst it is still 'tender' and attached to the tree before it has been broken off in judgment, then Summer / harvest / judgment is coming for sure, in that very generation. But words have multiple meanings, and this fact is not ignored by God in the way the Bible is written, nor by His Son in the way He spoke. The allusion can equally be to the Passover Angel who as it were restrained the Angel of Death by hovering over the blood-sprinkled doors of the faithful. This would continue the 'other' usage of language by the Lord in the fig tree parable, which means that once there is some beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel, then the repentance of that remnant will mean that the coming of the Lord is literally imminent and He stands *epi* the doors as the fulfilment of the Passover Angel.

24:34 *Truly I say to you, This generation shall not pass away*- This is similar to the Lord's teaching that some of His generation would not die until they had seen the coming of the Kingdom (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 9:27). His saying may not be linked directly to the fig tree parable, as if to say 'The generation that sees the fig tree fruit will not pass away until…'. Rather He may be concluding His message by again making clear that the entire prophecy was going to come true in that generation. Seeing that lifespans were not much over 40 years at that time, even AD70 would not have seen many of that generation alive. He says elsewhere that the actual people He was speaking with would see these things come true and see Him coming in glory. But this potential possibility was disallowed from happening in that generation by the refusal of Israel to repent and the weakness of spirituality and effort to spread the Gospel in those who did apparently believe into Christ. The transfiguration was hardly the main fulfilment of the Lord's words, even though the record of it directly follow the Lord's predictions. Like the events of AD70, it was at best a shadow fulfilment of the final coming of the Kingdom in visible power and glory. The use of "*this* generation" rather than "*that* generation" surely suggests

the Lord hoped for and indeed intended a fulfilment of His words literally in that very generation. But that generation passed- because fruit on the fig tree was not found. Israel did not repent, and there was little spiritual fruit on those Jews who did accept Christ. All 38 NT occurrences of *genea*, “generation”, clearly refer to the contemporary generation or group of listeners. Any attempt to interpret *genea* as referring to the race or nation of Israel becomes impossible because the text would require that the race or nation of Israel pass away at the Lord’s second coming, but Israel are clearly envisaged as existing as a separate entity in the Millennial Kingdom.

Until- If the Lord had meant simply 'until' we would read simply *heos*. But here we have two Greek words- *heos an*, which together denote a sense of conditionality and uncertainty. This is understandable if we understand that the Lord is talking of how His coming *could be* in that generation- but that depended upon some conditions which were beyond Him to fulfil and which depended upon men.

All these things are accomplished- AV "Be fulfilled". There is surely a word play between *ginomai* ["fulfilled"] and *genea* ["generation"]. That generation would not pass until all has 'become'. This is not the usual word used for the fulfilment of prophecies. When Matthew writes of the fulfilment of prophecies (and he does this often), the word *pleroo* is used. But here a much vaguer and more general word is used. Mark's record brings this out- the disciples ask when "all these things" would be "fulfilled" (*sunteleo*), and the Lord concludes the fig tree parable by saying "all these things" would be *ginomai* (Mk. 13:4,30). That would appear purposeful; the Lord held out the definite possibility for His return in the first century and the fulfilment of all things He had spoken of. But He was surely aware that this could be rescheduled, and so He used a word pregnant with the possibility that "that generation" would see the 'coming into being' of the scenario He was presenting. That generation [*ginomai*] could have been the fulfilment [*genea*] of all things, or they could have been at least the coming into being of that fulfilment; even if they failed to respond, they would not be without significance in bringing into being the ultimate fulfilment.

24:35 *Heaven and earth may pass away*- This could simply be saying to the effect 'Even if heaven and earth could pass, which they cannot, there is even less possibility that My words shall not be fulfilled'. Mt. 5:18 seems to use the term in that sense- "Even until [*heos*, i.e. 'even if'] heaven and earth pass...". In this case, we are not to even bother trying to understand 'heaven and earth' as 'a system of things', although this is certainly how the term is used, especially in the context of the Jewish system. And yet later New Testament allusion to this passage seems to suggest we are justified in seeing some reference to the Jewish, Mosaic system of the first century. Heb. 12:26 speaks as if heaven and earth are

to be so shaken by the blood of Christ and the new covenant that they will pass away just as Sinai shook at the inauguration of the old covenant. 2 Pet. 3:7-13 is perhaps the clearest statement- the 'heaven and earth' which "are now" in the first century were to pass away and be replaced by a new heaven and earth in which righteousness dwells. Clearly 'heaven and earth' are not literal, because righteousness already dwells in literal Heaven, and the earth shall not be literally destroyed; this passing of 'heaven and earth' is patterned after the destruction of sinful *society* in Noah's time (2 Pet. 3:5). We note that the Olivet prophecy concludes with a warning that society would become like it was in the days of Noah. Clearly this major changeover did happen in the first century in that the Jewish and Mosaic system did finally pass away in AD70 with the destruction of the temple. And yet Peter's words also seem to demand application to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clearly the heaven and earth of the Kingdom could have come in the first century, but 'all' that happened was that the Jewish and Mosaic systems were ended; this was in itself created a requirement for a *new* 'heaven and earth' in which dwells righteousness, but that system has evidently not yet physically come on earth. In this sense, what happened in AD70 was a guarantee and a creation of the requirement for the new Kingdom to come- see on :34 *Be fulfilled*.

The Greek word *Ge* ["earth"] is used often for the 'land' of Israel in the NT. We must remember that although the NT is written in Greek, it strongly reflects Hebrew usage of words. Again, the word commonly refers to the land of Israel. Consider some examples:
- "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King" (Mt. 5:34,35). This is alluding to the Jewish habit of swearing by their own land.
- "What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers?" (Mt. 17:25). The rulers of the earth were those ruling over Israel.
- "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Mt. 23:35). The blood shed on the earth means that which was shed in the land.
- Heaven and earth passing away (Mt. 24:35) follows on the Lord speaking of how all tribes of the earth / land would mourn in repentance (:30). He was speaking in the common OT idiom that used 'heaven and earth' for Israel. The nation would pass away in AD70, but His words would not.

But my words shall not pass away- The Lord uses *logos* here rather than any other term for 'words', perhaps because He perceived that it was the

essence of what He was saying that would be fulfilled, rather than necessarily the very letter.

There seems a parallel with :34. "My words shall not pass away" is parallel with "This generation shall not pass away"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away" is parallel with "All these things [being] fulfilled". 'Heaven and earth' passing is therefore in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth in fulfilment of all that was prophesied by the Lord. But there is then a parallel between "My words" and "this generation". The intention may be to show that that generation were to be identified with the Lord's words, and thereby with Himself. For whenever He elsewhere uses the term "My words", it is always in parallel to 'I Myself' (Mk. 8:38; Jn. 12:48; 14:23; 15:27). He was His words; He was the quintessential logos. And that generation were to be identified with them. If they did so, if the tender branch of the fig tree became one with the Messianic branch of the Old Testament prophecies, then all would be fulfilled in that generation (see on :32).

24:36 *But of that day and hour- Hemera* can refer to a period rather than a specific calendar day; it occurs often in the prophecy: “Those days” (:19), “those days should be shortened” (:22), “the tribulation of those days” (:29), “the days of Noah” (:37), “the days that were before the flood” (:38). So the Lord isn’t necessarily saying that there is a calendar day and hour within that day when He will return. He may even be implying that God has given us conditions to fulfil, and not a calendar date. There is no calendar date discernible from our side, because it is conditional. The Lord repeats this teaching in 25:13 when He says that we must watch exactly because “you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes”. When the disciples later asked to know this date, the Lord replied that “the times or seasons” have been “set within [the Father’s] own authority” (Acts 1:7 RV). This sounds like God has set up required preconditions, and the actual moment of the Lord’s return is somehow within frames of reference which His own authority alone has determined. But the Lord goes straight on to remind them of their calling to take the Gospel worldwide (Acts 1:8); for that was one of the major preconditions. Instead of trying to discern a specific date ahead of time, they were instead to refocus upon the spreading of the Gospel. If all the mental effort put into trying to discern the calendar date had been put into simply spreading the Gospel, then perhaps the Lord would be here by now. However, there is also the possibility that in the very last days, the last generation *will* in fact know the day and hour- see below on *Knows no man*.

No one knows- There’s a major theme of knowing / seeing / perceiving in the Olivet prophecy. *Eido*, translated “knows”, carries the essential idea of ‘seeing’ or perceiving. We are to “see” / know / perceive the abomination

of desolation (:15), and when we “see” / know / perceive “all these things, know that it is near” (:33). And yet, despite that, we can not know, at least at this stage, the day nor the hour of the Lord’s coming. The reason is made crystal clear in :42: “Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] what hour your Lord comes”. 25:13 repeats this: “Watch *therefore* because you do not know [s.w.] neither the day nor the hour in which your Lord comes”. The ‘watching’, therefore, is the watching of ourselves and for the welfare of others; *not* the activity of seeking to match world events with Bible prophecies. So our watching is exactly because we do not know the day and hour. God in His wisdom made it like this- so that we should watch all the time. If we knew when the Lord were coming, then we would not watch for Him until that time. Such is human nature. If a man knows what day and hour the thief is coming, he will watch for him at that time (:43). But if he doesn’t know, then he must watch all the time. So, looking at it from that point of view, it is absolutely necessary that we do *not* know the day and hour. And yet it seems so many have seriously misunderstood this. They think that they *can* work out the day and hour, and their ‘watching’ is not so much a personal readiness for the Lord’s coming at any moment as an extended scouring of the media in an attempt to slot various international happenings into Bible prophecies. Indeed it is observable that personal watchfulness often apparently comes to be excused because of ‘watching’ the “signs of the times”.

It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" he was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication he was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when

Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'. There are so many connections between the Olivet prophecy and Daniel that perhaps it is legitimate to think that the Lord was alluding to the Angel's refusal to tell Daniel the time of Messiah's coming. That the Lord was primarily referring to the twelve when he spoke of them not knowing "when the time is" (Mk. 13:33) is confirmed if we appreciate that the Lord Jesus sometimes uses "the time" as a reference to the appointed time for his own death (Mt. 26:18; Mk. 14:35; Jn. 7:6,8). The disciples were fascinated with the time of his return, and the Lord was giving them the signs. But knowing his death was only days away, inevitably he had in mind "the time" of his passion. And he knew that as they didn't know the time of his return, so they didn't understand the time of his death. Having pointed out that they knew not "the time", in words surely reminiscent of his criticism of Jewry generally for not knowing "the time" of his coming and death (Mt. 16:3; Lk. 19:44), the Lord went on to tell the story of the man (himself) who left his household (the disciples) and told them to watch, with warnings as to what would happen if they didn't. Every one of those warnings, and some other language in the Olivet prophecy, came true of the disciples in the next few days, in the context of "the time" being the time of Christ's death:

They shall deliver you up to the councils	As Christ to the Sanhedrin
Beaten	Christ buffeted
rulers and kings for a testimony	Chief priests, Herod, Pilate
...brother shall betray the brother	Judas; Peter's denial?
...turn back to take up his garment	John Mark's linen garment
...false Christs...	An echo of 'Barabbas'?
the sun shall be darkened...	As at the crucifixion
Watch pray...	"Watch with me"; Gethsemane
at even...	Last Supper
at midnight...	Gethsemane
at the cock crowing	Peter's denials
in the morning	trials and crucifixion
find you sleeping	disciples in Gethsemane

And at the end of the prophecy, He hammered this home again: "When (the trees) now shoot forth, ye see it, and know of your own selves that Summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things... know ye" (Lk. 21:30,31 RV). The very personal feeling within us that Summer is near is likened to our knowledge of the imminence of the

Lord's coming; you can't be told by anyone else that Summer's coming, you see the signs, and you know within your own self.

Not even the Angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father- A clear indication of their limited knowledge, which helps explain their 'testing' of God's servants in some Old Testament incidents, apparently in order to obtain more knowledge about them.

24:37 *And as*- The similarity with Noah's days is logically linked to the Lord's word about not knowing the day nor the hour. In the digression about this, I suggest that the very last generation may in fact know the day and hour. And that would be similar to Noah. There is no indication that he knew exactly when the flood would come- until he was told right at the end of the period, that the time had come and he must enter the ark.

Were the days- "The days" are parallel with "the coming" of the Lord. The scenario outlined earlier in these notes is of the Lord 'coming' for the faithful, them consciously choosing to go to meet Him, and then their 'coming' along with Him in judgment upon the unfaithful and Israel's immediate enemies. Therefore a period of time is made parallel with the Lord's "coming". See on :36 *That day*. The "days of Noah" may refer to the way in which God told Noah of the flood, but in Gen. 7:1,4 told him that now there were "yet seven days" until the flood actually came, and he must now enter the ark. The gathering of the animals was done within those seven days (Gen. 7:1-3). In this lies the similarity with the last days. We know the outline picture- that judgment will come, and there are reasons and signs of that. But only a few days before judgment breaks will the faithful be invited to go to meet the Lord, to enter the ark. And in that period the Gospel will be spread to all nations, the last final appeal will be made. Just as Noah filled the huge ark, which could have saved so many people, with any animal willing to agree to come on board. The shutting of the door of the ark would then directly correspond with Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:25: "The door was shut". Just as desperate people would've knocked on the shut door of the ark, so the unfaithful will knock on the door which the Lord has now closed. In this life we can knock on the closed door, recognizing our condemnation- and it will be opened (Lk. 11:7; Rev. 3:8). But after the Lord has 'come' in the sense of inviting us into the ark, to go forth and meet Him, the door will be shut.

Of Noah- A number of passages describe the AD70 judgments of Israel in terms of the flood; which suggests that they also have reference to the last days:
- 2 Peter 3 is a clear example, describing the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70 as being by fire as opposed to water used in Noah's time. Yet the chapter also has reference, e.g. through its links with the new Heavens and earth of Is. 65, with the destruction of the present age at

the Lord's return.
- Nahum 1 describes the coming judgements on Israel in terms of mountains and hills splitting, and there being a great flood; all Genesis flood language.
- Dan. 9:26 describes the Romans in AD70 destroying "the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood", the LXX implying with a sudden flood, as in Noah's time.
- Is. 54:9 describes the judgments on Israel being "as the waters of Noah". The end of the flood, the end of Israel's judgments, therefore typifies the second coming.
- In the light of this the Lord's parable about the man building on sand whose house was destroyed when the heavy rain came (Mt. 7:25,27) must have primary reference (as so many of the parables do) to the judgement on the Jewish house in AD70. Those who built on sand as a result of not hearing Christ's words were the Jews- also described as shoddy builders in Mt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7; Mic. 3:10; Jer. 22:13.
- The flood waters were upon the earth for 5 months. The siege of Jerusalem in AD70 lasted for the same period, coming after 3 years of the Roman campaign against Israel which started in AD67. The three and a half year suffering of Israel which culminated in AD70 may well point forward to a similar period in the last days; in which case the flood would typify the final months of that period, during which the judgments will be poured out most intensely. The five month tribulation of Rev. 9:10 may also have some relevance here.

Thus the state of Israel in AD70 was typified by the world of Noah's time, which therefore looks forward also to the last days, in the light of the evident connections between that period and our last days which are made in 2 Pet. 3 and the Olivet prophecy.

So shall be the coming of the Son of Man- This commonly used phrase (16:28; 24:27,30,39; 26:64) clearly quotes from Dan. 7:13: “One like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven”. This prophecy clearly speaks of the giving of the Kingdom to the Lord Jesus and His people at the end of the dominion of the fourth beast and its related horns. The prophecy could have been fulfilled in the first century- but it was rescheduled. This is another example of the conditionality in Daniel’s prophecies which we discussed in an earlier digression. Dan. 7:13 speaks of how the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven *before the Ancient of Days* and is given the Kingdom. What is in view is not so much the coming of Christ to earth but His coming to receive the Kingdom from the Father. Dan. 7:26,27: “The judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and

obey Him". "The Son of Man" is here interpreted as "the people of the saints of the Most High". The Son of Man, therefore, refers not just to the Lord personally but to all those in Him. Having chosen to go out to meet Him once they hear the trumpet call, they are snatched away to meet Him in the air and the Lord comes with them in judgment. This is the picture presented in 1 Thess. 4:16,17 and elsewhere. This is why His "coming" is parallel with a period of time- see on *The days*.

24:38 *For as in those days which were before the flood*- See on :37, perhaps a reference to the immediate seven days before the coming of the flood. *Pro* ("before") would suggest 'immediately before', something standing directly in front of something else. Perhaps those seven days were a period of feasting in the world around Noah, just as there will be a brief period of hedonistic prosperity in the world before Christ's coming, perhaps because of some international agreement which offers prosperity to the entire planet in return for some nominal acceptance of false religion [Islam?]. We note the period of "seven days" used for funeral celebrations (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13), wedding celebrations (Jud. 14:12,17) and general feasting (Esther 1:5; Job 1). The people around Noah were doing this right up until the last day of the seven days. Passover, a clear type of the final deliverance of God's people at the Lord's second coming, required a similar seven days preparation period (Ex. 12:19; 13:6) followed by a "day of the Lord", the actual feast, and "a solemn assembly" (Neh. 8:18). Indeed, the feasts of Yahweh all required a seven day period (Lev. 23), and each of them was in some way typical of the second coming.

They were eating and drinking- Lk. 21:34 is specific: "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, so that day come upon you unawares". It could fairly be asked 'Why is there this warning, if the believers of the last days are to be actively persecuted?'. This verse implies that the world will be in a materially prosperous state in the last days; it will be possible for us to become so preoccupied with it that we do not prepare for the time of tribulation, so that it comes as a sudden surprise. Of if "that day" is the day of Christ's coming, then it may be that by opting out of the persecution, we will be able to continue to enjoy the materialism of the world, in which case we will be caught unawares by the second coming. Thus while the saints are persecuted, the world enjoys a time of prosperity as it did in the times of Lot and Noah.

Marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark- Mt. 25:10 continues the Noah allusion by saying that the faithful 'enter in with Him' (s.w.), and the door is shut, just as it was with the ark.

24:39 *And they did not realize until*- The implication is that they did "know", but tragically too late. In the moment of their condemnation they

saw it all, so clearly; just as the process of condemnation so often results in men 'knowing Yahweh', but all too late. They will proclaim blessing on Jesus as Messiah next time they see Him, i.e. at judgment day (Lk. 13:35). But all too late. This is the basis for the gnashing of teeth in anger with oneself which :51 speaks of.

The flood came- Gk. *erchomai*. This is effectively the same word as used in :38 about Noah "entering" or 'coming into' the ark (*eis-erchomai*). The coming of the flood represents the coming of Jesus to the world- *erchomai* is so often used in the context in that connection (24:30,42,43,44,46,48; 25:6,10). The 'coming in' of Noah into the ark (cp. the response of the faithful to the call to go out and meet the returning Lord Jesus) is essentially the coming of the Lord, even if His public 'coming' may be a few days after the 'coming' to the believers. Keil translates Dan. 9:26,27: "The city, together with the sanctuary, shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who shall come, who shall find his end in the flood; but war shall continue to the end, since destruction is irrevocably decreed. That prince shall force a strong covenant for one week on the mass of the people, and during half a week he shall take away the service of sacrifice, and borne on the wings of idol abominations [cp. Ps. 18:10, where the true God is also borne on wings] shall carry on a desolating rule, till the firmly decreed judgment shall pour itself upon him as one desolated" (*Commentary* p. 373). Antichrist's destruction with *the* flood [note the definite article] comfortably connects with the Lord's usage of the flood as a symbol of the latter day judgment upon His enemies (Mt. 24:39). The person spoken about will be involved in war until the end of his days; he will die at the end of his military campaign against God's people. This was certainly not true of Titus in AD70.

And took them all away. So shall the coming of the Son of Man be- The 'coming' of the flood represents the 'coming' of the Lord; just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away', so :40 continues that theme, that one shall be "taken" and another left. The 'taking away' of the one in the field is therefore 'taking away' in condemnation rather than the snatching away of the faithful to meet the Lord. The Greek *airo* definitely means to be taken *up*. Upward movement into the air is definitely in view. It could be that the Lord has in view the responsible. Those who respond to the call and want to go and meet their Lord will be confirmed in that by being caught up to meet Him (1 Thess. 4:16,17). Those who delay, the foolish virgins who go to buy oil, will all the same be gathered to judgment by being snatched away- but just a short time later.

24:40 *Then two men shall be in the field. One shall be taken and one left*- The 'taking away' is in judgment / condemnation / destruction, just as the unbelieving world were 'taken away' (:39). The idea of not being 'left' is what the Olivet prophecy started with- not one stone would be "left" (s.w., 24:2). But there will not be the total destruction of all persons on

the earth at this time. The unworthy responsible will be 'taken away'- see on :39 *And took them all away*- and those not responsible to judgment will be "left". The Greek has a wide range of possible meanings here- the word is translated 'forgiven', 'sent away', and perhaps there is here the hint that they will be preserved to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom. In this sense we must remember the Lord's definition that "the field is the word" (13:38). And earlier in the Olivet prophecy He has foreseen that the faithful who are called away will be "in the field" (:18). The parable of the prodigal son likewise features the two sons, both in a field (Lk. 15:15,25 s.w.). The prodigal leaves the field and goes to the Father. The older son refuses to ultimately leave the field and go in to the Father. Legalism and judgmentalism is therefore quite enough to warrant being 'taken away' to condemnation.

The present tense is used here. Therefore the RV gives "One is taken, the other is left". Perhaps this was to heighten our sense that the essence of judgment is now; the call of the Gospel is a call to journey to judgment day. The same arresting use of the present tense [in the Greek] is to be found in :41 and :43- perhaps for the same reason.

24:41 *Two women*- So much of the Lord's teaching sensitively gives examples including men, and then including women. He was so very far ahead of His time in being so gender inclusive.

Shall be grinding at the mill. One shall be taken and one left- Using millstones, which are always used in the Bible as symbolic of condemnation. These people were working out their own condemnation. One [the responsible] would be taken away to destruction, the other [not responsible to Divine judgment] would be "left". See on :40.

24:42 *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on what day your Lord comes*- Throughout Christ's discourses concerning his return, "watch / stay awake" is the key-word (Mt. 24:42; 25:13; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:37; 21:36). There are at least ten New Testament allusions to Christ's command for us to "watch" in the last days, and thus be found loving the appearing of Christ; this alone indicates how our lives should be characterized by this spirit of watching. I would go so far as to say that generally we seem almost unaware of this emphasis. "Watch... watch... watch" is the cry that comes out from our Lord himself. It seems almost unknown to us that we are *commanded* by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, with a great sense of urgency, to live in this spirit of watchfulness for His return. It is easy to think that the command to watch means that we should scan Bible prophecies and compare them with current world events, and thereby see the coming of Christ approaching. However, this is not the idea behind the word "watch". We are told to watch precisely because we do *not* know the time of Christ's appearing; therefore Jesus

cannot be telling us (in this command) to watch political developments as pointers towards the date of His return. "Watch" nearly always refers to watching our personal spirituality, and concerning ourselves with that of others'. The Hebrew word translated "watch" carries the idea of defending, holding on as a matter of life or death, enduring with stamina, being awake. Thus Habakkuk speaks of "watching", i.e. being spiritually sensitive, to what God is going to tell him (Hab. 2:1). Doing a study of New Testament allusions to Christ's command to "watch" yields conclusions which may seem unpleasantly negative to some. In Greek, the verb 'to watch' is related to the noun 'watch', referring to soldiers guarding something, or the period of guard duty. The idea behind 'watching' is definitely defensive rather than aggressive. In the same way as the gate keeper of a large house has to watch, to guard and protect, so should we in the last days (Mk. 13:34-37). Lk. 21:36 defines watching as praying always, concentrating our faith upon the fact that ultimately we will stand acceptably before the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment, and by His grace be saved from the great judgments which will surely come upon this world. The ideas of watching and praying often occur together (Lk. 21:36; Mk. 14:38; Mt. 26:41; Eph. 6:18; 1 Pet. 4:7). Prayer for our forgiveness, for acceptance by our Lord, must therefore characterize our watching in these last days. We must " watch" in the sense of being on our guard against the possibility of personal and communal apostasy from the faith (Acts 20:31); "watching" is standing fast in the doctrines of the one faith (1 Cor. 16:31), exhorting and encouraging others in the household of faith (1 Thess. 5:6,11), holding fast in ecclesias swamped by apathy and apostasy, strengthening what remains (Rev. 3:2,3; 2 Tim. 4:3-5), keeping the oil of the word burning in our lamps even though others have let it burn out (Mt. 25:13).

The blessedness of the 'watching' is not that they have an accurate timeline in place; we must watch exactly because we *don't* and *can't* know the exact time of the Lord's return. We cannot, therefore, have a detailed timeline which tells us *for sure* that Jesus will return after event x or y. We can speculate, of course, but we cannot say for sure. The message is to be ready, to love Him and His return, just because we *don't* know when exactly He is coming (Mt. 24:42; 25:13). 'Watching' means holding to our faith and repenting of our weaknesses in Rev. 3:3- not interpreting latter day prophecies. This of itself won't make us spiritual people. The Greek word translated "watch" is usually translated "imprison" - the idea is of guarding oneself and ones' faith, "vigilantly" watching out against the [Biblical] devil [same word in 1 Pet. 5:8], rather than searching for the understanding of latter day prophecy.

We do not know the exact calendar date of the appearing of Christ; and yet we should be watching for his coming with the same intensity *as if* we did know the day and hour. This seems to be the message behind Mt. 24:42,43, where Jesus reasons that if the manager of a wealthy house

knew when the thief was coming, he would have watched carefully; 'And that', Jesus continued, 'Should be the intensity of expectancy *you* should have towards my return, even though you don't know the exact date'. Now this is quite something. If we knew the exact date of the Lord's return, we can imagine how we might behave the day before. It seems Christ is asking us to imagine that scenario; and then He asks us to live like this all the time. This is truly a high challenge. Our attitude to God's word, entertainment, hobbies, money, relationships; all these areas of life would probably be somewhat different to what they are now if we really took on board this idea: that we should live *as if* we expect the imminent return of Christ. This idea makes sense of two apparently contradictory strands in the Lord's teaching: that we do not know the exact time of His return (Mt. 24:36,42,44; 25:13; Acts 1:7), and yet He tells us clearly it will come "soon" (Rev. 1:1,3 and many other passages). Perhaps the implication is that we should read coming 'soon' as meaning 'as *if* you know He is coming soon'. For, we ourselves cannot know the exact time.

Am. 5:18 and Mal. 3:1,2 warn that just desiring the coming of the Lord isn't enough; for what end will it be, if we don't *truly* love His appearing? Yet Amos goes on to say that Israel "put far away" the reality of the day of the Lord, in their minds (Am. 6:3). And yet they desired it. We can study prophecy, but not really love His appearing in seriously preparing ourselves for that day. Indeed, we can subconsciously put it far from us. When we grasp for a fleeting moment how *very near* is the second coming for us; can we dwell upon it, retain that intensity? Or would we rather put it "far away"? This is surely why the Lord brings the list of signs of His coming to a close with some chilling parables concerning the need for personal watchfulness. It's as if He could foresee generations of believers straining to interpret His words carefully, correctly matching them with trends in the world... and yet missing the essential point: that we must watch and prepare ourselves for His coming, whenever it may be for us. Having given so many indicators of His soon appearing, the Lord then says that His coming will be unexpected by the believers (Mt. 24:36,44). He wasn't saying 'Well, you'll never properly interpret what I've just said'. He meant rather: 'OK you'll know, more or less, when my return is imminent; but all the same, *in reality* it will be terribly unexpected for most of you unless you prepare yourselves. You need to make personal changes, and be watchful of yourselves; otherwise all the correct prophetic interpretation in the world is meaningless'.

24:43 *But know this!*- Our focus should be on 'knowing' that we don't 'know' the time of His coming; and therefore watching at all times, living *as if* His return is imminent. This would be one explanation of why Paul and Peter write in their letters as if the Lord's return is imminent when in fact He did not return in the first century.

That if the master of the house had known in what watch- The Lord is drawing a parallel between the householder watching, and the disciples / believers watching, being aware of the possibility of the Lord's return at any moment. He will only come unexpectedly, as a thief, to those who are not watching and are caught unprepared. But almost every usage of *oikodespotes* in the parables is concerning the Lord Jesus (10:25; 13:27; 20:1,11; 21:33; Lk. 13:25). As so often, the Lord was speaking to the disciples but not forgetting to speak also to Himself. He was soon to ask them in Gethsemane to watch and pray *with Him* (26:38); as if His watchfulness was to be theirs. In 13:52 He does also use this term about every scribe instructed in the things of the Kingdom. We are all the master of the house in the sense that we are to all be watching out for the household as a whole; the work of the Lord Jesus is to be our work. 'Watching' is thereby defined as not only watching ourselves, but watching out for the rest of the household. This is being presented here as the supreme way of not becoming unwatchful. By watching out for others we are watching for the Lord's return, living with the imminence of His coming over before us.

The thief was coming- Gk 'is coming'. See on 24:40 *Taken… left*.

He would have stayed awake- The point is surely that if we were to know when the Lord is coming, then we would watch for Him *at the time of His coming*; just as a householder would watch out for a thief if he knew ahead of time when the thief was coming. Because we do not know when the Lord is coming, we must watch for His coming all the time, living *as if* He is coming imminently even though we do not *know* for sure whether He is or not. Therefore our living as if He is about to come is to be done independently of any hunches we may have that He is about to return, based as they usually are upon prophetic interpretations. Lk. 12:35-38 repeats the same teaching, but with the metaphor of men keeping watch all night so that they might open to the Lord immediately.

And would not have let his house be broken into- This is the key; recognizing that the household of God is in fact our household, and we are to watch out for it as we would for our very own family. Indeed, it is our family. The connection is to 23:38 "*Your house* is left unto you desolate". Here, "*his house*" is "broken up". The Lord is saying that they were in the status of condemnation already. The physical breaking up of the temple would be the result of the elders of Israel not 'watching' as intended.

24:44 *Therefore you also must be ready*- The Lord was initially speaking to the disciples, the future elders of the church. The elders, represented by "the goodman of the house", have a special responsibility in this watching, so that the Lord's return is not thief-like to the 'house' of their ecclesia (Mt. 24:43). They "watch for your souls" (Heb. 13:17). But in a sense, the duty of watching falls to each of us: we're all elders (Lk.

12:41-46). All believers are called to watch, and that watching involves watching for others. The connection with 1 Thess. 5:2,6 therefore suggests that one of the reasons for the unworthy experiencing the second coming "as a thief" will be the lack of awareness by their elders concerning the spiritual trials of the last days. The reverse is also true. A good latter-day elder will have to give his very soul to the work of watching over the flock, fully aware of the many dangers they face in the last days. It is difficult to see how this vital role can be filled by those who have sold their souls to demanding employers. This work can't be simply left to others. This passage teaches that the servant who must feed the household with appropriate food represents each of us; he must watch for the Lord's return and be diligent in feeding the household; yet (it must be stressed), this parable is intended for each of us (cp. Mk. 13:37). If he doesn't do this, he is rejected. We are set a high standard here. Christ is "the goodman of the house" (Mt. 20:11), but here "the goodman of the house" represents each of us (Mt. 24:43; Lk. 12:39,40). We are in Him, and therefore we must try to share his level of concern for his household. He carried his cross for us, for our salvation. And he asks us to share His cross, i.e. His devotion to the body of believers, even unto death. If we are in Him, we too must devote ourselves to the saving of the body.

The very same word and idea for "ready" is repeated in 25:10. Those who were "ready" and responded immediately to the news of the Lord's return were accepted. The 'readiness' is in being constantly ready to leave all and go to be with the Lord. We shouldn't be so surprised, therefore, that life in this world is so unbearable for the believers; for we are being led to a point where we will be ready and eager to leave all for the sake of being with the Lord.

For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect- The fact we do not know the date of the Lord's return is what makes us live in a spirit of constant readiness for His coming. The point is that we should be "ready" even when we "think not" that the Lord's coming is near. The contrast is being drawn between on one hand our 'readiness', and on the other, our 'thinking', our computing, our calculations, the seeming to us, that the return of Christ is near.

"The Son of Man comes" uses the present tense, whereas "Be… ready" would properly require the future tense. There may be here a hint that the future coming of the Son of Man in essence is ongoing in the life of the believer.

24:45 *Who then*- Translated "What manner of man?" in Mk. 4:41; Lk. 1:66.

Is the faithful and wise servant- The Lord has just likened us to the master of the house, but now He explains further. We have responsibility

for the house and act in the role of the householder because He has given us that responsibility. Our 'watching' is to be expressed in terms of ensuring that all the household have their food at the appropriate time. In Mk. 13:34,35 the Lord expands on this parable in saying that each of the servants are given a different work, but He wants us to be like the doorkeeper [AV "porter"], whose job it was to simply watch- and "You, watch, therefore!". Putting together the various images, we see that we are likened to the very master of the house; then to the chief steward who was to provide food for the household; and then to the lowest doorkeeper. We are thoroughly representative of the Lord Himself, the steward of the household, and the lowest servant, the doorkeeper. But throughout the analogies, we are to above all mirror the way in which they watched / looked out for the wellbeing of the household. Being occupied with this is what makes a person ready and watching for their Lord's return.

This is the "good and faithful [s.w.] servant" of 25:21,23 who is commended for trading his Lord's goods and making increase of them. Here, the duty of the faithful servant is to care for the household. These are different metaphors for the same reality- spiritual care for others is a way of increasing the overall wealth of the Lord and the progress of His household. We have been delegated a huge amount, and the Lord is 'absent', not in the sense that He is not spiritually with us, but in that He will not intervene in how we carry on His work. The salvation and spiritual prosperity of others is therefore in our hands. By laziness and unwise behaviour we can seriously damage them and limit the progress of the Lord's business; and He being 'absent' will not forcibly intervene to stop us, in this life. The "wise servant" is likewise to be connected with the "wise [s.w.] virgins" of the very next parable (25:2,4,8,9). The connection is, however, slightly odd. The wise servant is to provide food for the others in the household. The wise virgins were unable to provide oil for the weaker members of the household, because they were themselves weak and had fallen asleep when clearly they were intended to remain awake. If the connection with the next parable is indeed purposeful, then we are left with the picture of the wise virgins being wise only in that they *intended* to provide for others, although in reality they were too weak themselves to follow through with that intention in practice. But their intention to do so was counted to them as wisdom.

Whom his lord has set over his household- This parable is repeated with the same Greek words in Lk. 12:42,43 but with a change in tense: "Who then is the faithful and wise steward whom his master shall set over his household to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his master, when he comes, shall find so doing". The idea is surely that if we are doing that now, we shall do it eternally. If we are found 'doing' care and provision for the household, then we shall be empowered to eternally do this in essence. The important thing is that

when the Lord comes, He finds us engaged [at least mentally] with what we shall eternally be doing, living the essence of the Kingdom life now. We have been made ruler over the household now; we shall be set over it eternally if when the Lord comes He finds us doing what He has appointed us to do. See on 24:47 *Shall make him ruler*.

To give them their food in due time?- When the Lord comes, He finds the servant either smiting the servants (:49), or feeding and caring for them (:45). Our attitude to our brethren in the moment of our Lord's coming will decide our eternal future. The structure of the parable allows of no half way position. The purpose of any authority given to any of us within the household is in order to feed others. If that, in the end, is not being done, then we are abusing the trust and authority given us by the Lord. The "food" is called their *sitometron* in Lk. 12:42, their "portion of food", or ration. The impression is given of a steward providing the right food ['nourishment'] for the right persons at the right time. This is the essence of all care for others. *Kairos*, "due season", means literally 'time', and is often used about 'the time' of the Lord's return (8:29; 13:30; 16:3; 21:34). Indeed it is used in the Olivet prophecy for this moment: "You know not when the time is" (Mk. 13:33). The idea seems to be that instead of worrying about calculating "the time" of the Lord's coming, we are instead to be concerned with feeding others in the household at that *kairos* or time. This is the sign of our preparedness and watchfulness, and not our [apparent] skill in matching world events to Bible prophecies.

24:46 *Blessed is that servant*- The only other reference by the Lord to blessed servants is in Lk. 12:37,38,43 where He teaches the blessedness of the servant who is found awake / watching when his Lord returns. 'Watching' is a major theme here in Mt. 24, but the blessing in view here is for "doing", actually providing nourishment for the household. Again we see the parallel between watching and doing. Watching can never be an academic interest in Bible prophecies. It has to be active, or else it isn't 'watching' in the sense intended.

Whom his lord when he comes shall find so doing…- Again we find emphasized the eternal importance of our attitude of mind at the moment of the Lord's coming. Those who want to go to the Lord are confirmed in their desire by being snatched away to meet Him, whereas those who don't have that immediacy of desire will be left behind, to be forcibly gathered to Him later.

24:47 *Truly I say to you, that he will set him over all that he has*- See on :45 *Has made ruler*. If we are doing what we have been empowered to do for the household now, then we shall be appointed to eternally do this.

The state of perfection in the Kingdom is described as us (the complete church of all ages) having reached, "a perfect man... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", having grown up into Christ, who is the

head of the body (Eph. 4:13,15). When Christ comes, we will each individually be made ruler over *all* that He has, we will each individually be fully righteous, fully manifesting the Lord Jesus. There seems to be marked connection with the fact (brought out in the parable of the talents) that we will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47; 25:15). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.).

In this life, the servant was 'made ruler over' [s.w.] the household, his job was to feed his fellow servants. If he is found so doing at the Lord's return, he will be made ruler over literally all that his master owns, "all his goods" (AV) is literally 'all that He has'. This is a profound insight into the nature of eternity. All that God has will be put under us. God has not subjected the world to come to the Angels but to us (Heb. 2:5). This is because "all things" are to be put in subjection under the Lord Jesus (Heb. 2:8), and all that is true of Him is true of us. But that being part of Him is dependent upon our serving of our brethren within the household. See on :43 *The householder*- He is the householder, but we also are, because we are in Him.

24:48 *But if that evil servant*- The next parable likewise features two types of servant; the "faithful" servant [s.w.], and the equivalent of this "evil servant" is the "wicked and lazy servant… the unprofitable servant" (25:26,30). That servant who did nothing is paralleled with the servant who proactively got drunk, thought his Lord delayed, and beat his brethren. Despite all that bad behaviour, the real issue was that he did nothing positive for his Lord. So often, the fellow servants are effectively beaten because of the sins of omission, inaction, refusal to stand up for the abused.

Shall say in his heart- The Bible knows nothing of a personal, cosmic Satan. Rather the real adversary is presented as the human heart, and therefore a huge amount of attention is given to the state of the human heart and the significance of our self-talk. Nobody consciously says 'The Lord is delaying, great, now I can drink and abuse my brethren'. But the Lord puts His finger on the self-talk that goes on in our deep subconscious, and He does so in the context of warning against having a specific date in mind for the second coming.

My Lord's coming- There is no turning to atheism or rebellion against the Lord, but rather the root cause of the misbehaviour is placed by the parable upon the man's mentality that because he knows the date of his Lord's coming, he can just ensure he's behaving properly when He comes. And this is the purpose of the parable- to challenge that idea and explain why the date must be left unknown by us. This is the same idea as the

foolish virgins not taking oil with them in the next parable. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

Is delayed- The Lord Jesus / bridegroom "tarries" (Mt. 25:5), the same Greek word translated 'delay' in "my Lord delays His coming". The Lord *does* delay His coming- the man's mistake was in acting inappropriately because of this. God's judgments likewise "waited", or delayed, in Noah's time (1 Pet. 3:20)- presumably for the 120 year period of Gen. 6:3. In a similar way, the judgment on Nineveh preached by Jonah also delayed- it came in the end, but their repentance meant that it delayed at that time. In the first century, all things were ready for the Supper- supper time had come. But the start of the supper has been delayed 2000 years by Israel's rejection of the invitation to participate (Lk. 14:17). The evil servant misbehaved because he thought the Lord had delayed and therefore he could misbehave, so long as he got his act together at the time of the Lord's coming. This parable is therefore an explanation of why we must recognize that we don't know the date of the Lord's return; if we do think we know it, then this will lead us into misbehaviour. Those with a determinate, black and white view of God and His prophetic style have often shown us the truth of this parable. They thought the Lord would return at a certain date, or once certain conditions had been fulfilled. These things happened, and the Lord didn't come- and their behaviour went seriously downhill.

Moses' sprinkling of Israel with blood and then going away for forty days (the period of probation), returning after a perceived delay to a people lost in revelry with only a faithful minority, must point forward to our Lord's ascension to the Father's presence after the blood sprinkling of the cross, and His subsequent return. Christ's words of Mt. 24:48,50 suggest he read this incident along these lines: "That evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming (cp. "Where is the promise of his coming?" and the people feeling Moses had delayed to return); and shall begin to... eat and drink with the drunken (cp. "the people sat down to eat and drink", 1 Cor. 10:7); the Lord of that servant shall come... in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder" - recalling the Levite's sudden massacre of the people on Moses' return. If the return of Moses from the mount is indeed typical of the second coming, then it would follow that the majority of the new Israel will be unprepared at the Lord's return also.

"The Lord (Jesus- v.15,18) is not slack concerning his promise (to return- of Jn.14:3,18,28), as some men (in the ecclesia) count slackness", but is longsuffering (2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek for "slack" here means 'delay'; this is assurance that God is not 'delaying' as men dilly-dally in the execution of their plans, but is rather postponing this for a good reason. There's an allusion here to Is. 30:17-19, which records how Israel would suffer for their sins, but then God would wait for a certain time until they cried to Him in repentance, before bringing about a time of blessing on the earth based around the Lord's presence in Jerusalem: "One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one (Dt. 28 language)... till ye be left as a tree bereft of branches (how Paul describes what happened to Israel in the first century, Rom. 11)... and therefore (i.e. because you are such sinners) will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted (through your repentance), that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him. For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem: thou shalt weep no more (the language of Is. 65:17-25, quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13): He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry (of repentance): *when* He shall hear it, He will answer thee". Not only is God delaying the Kingdom until there is repentance in Israel, but such is His *mercy* that He will not bring it about until such repentance. His purpose should not be seen, therefore, just in terms of the cold equation 'Repentance in Israel= second coming', but the supreme *mercy* and *love* which this arrangement shows should be appreciated. "And *therefore* will He be exalted" Isaiah comments- by those who understand these things. Rom. 11:32-36 is a marvellous example of this.

24:49 *And shall begin*- The idea is that only soon after he has begun his misbehaviour, the Lord comes. This highlights the point that because the man was sure that he knew the exact time of the Lord's coming, and that time was not right now, *therefore* he did these bad things. The whole point of the parable is to explain *why* we do not and should not ever think we know the date of His coming. For it is this which is portrayed in the parable as the root reason why he begins beating the fellow servants and being self-indulgent, mixing with the unbelievers rather than the believers.

To beat his fellow servants- Smiting the fellow servants is related to keeping other company- with the drunken. It could be that this parable is intended to have a specific latter day fulfilment, in that it speaks of the last few days or little while before the Lord's return. For the evil servant has only just begun to beat, eat and drink, when his Lord comes. The 'smiting' might suggest that the evil servant joins in the persecution of the Lord's servants which will be ongoing in that final period of tribulation.

The idea of the steward of the house smiting the fellow servant (Mt. 24:49) is referred to by Paul (in the Greek text) in 1 Cor. 8:12, concerning *wounding* the conscience of weak brethren. Paul's vision of the latter day ecclesia was therefore that materialistic elders would act with no thought as to their effect on the consciences of the flock, and thereby many would stumble. The Lord's only other reference to fellow servants is in 18:28-33, where the deeply indebted servant 'beat' a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. The beating of the fellow servants may therefore be intended to be understood in terms of refusing to forgive, and demanding what is due.

And shall eat and drink with the drunkards- His duty was to feed his fellow servants, but instead he became obsessed with feeding himself. The Lord has just spoken of 'eating and drinking' as characterizing Noah's world (:38)- and also Lot's world (Lk. 17:28). There's nothing wrong with any of the things Noah's world were doing in themselves, but they were indulged in to the point of obsession. The man called to go in to the ark and care for those within it had instead gone outside into the world and engaged with them in their way of life. The next verse continues allusions to Noah's time.

Lk. 12:45 adds that the man himself becomes drunk; he is influenced by the company he now keeps. Mt. 24:49 is alluded to in 1 Thess. 5:3-7, where the picture is graphically created of a man who has been hard drinking for a whole evening, now at home stupefied, late at night. It is then that the thief comes; whilst dimly aware of his coming, the man is quite unprepared to meet him and keep his (spiritual) house intact. This will be the tragic position of those who through belief and practice are unready for their Lord. It seems that a materialistic eldership, uncommitted to the real needs of the household, indifferent to guarding the house, will contribute to our latter day apostasy as a community. And note the correspondence between those who are harsh on their brethren being those who are also caught up in the things of the world. The drunken servant starts to beat the fellow servants, using a Greek word which means to punish (Lk. 12:45). This creates the picture of a worldly ecclesial elder over-disciplining others. No wonder there will be so much friction and disunity amongst spiritual Israel of the last days.

24:50 *The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he does not expect him and in an hour*- The implication is that the unfaithful servant should have 'known' and 'been aware of' his Lord's coming. He should have lived every moment as if *this* were the day and hour of the Lord's coming; even whilst recognizing that he does not finally know it. There is another possibility, discussed in a separate digression- and that is simply

that the faithful in [literally] the very last few days *will* in fact know that the day and hour. The language of the Olivet prophecy brims with certainty as to the faithful *knowing* the time: "When ye shall see these things come to pass, *know* that it is nigh... ye *know* that Summer is near... *when* ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then *know* that the desolation thereof is nigh... when ye therefore shall *see* (same Greek translated "know") the abomination of desolation... when ye *see* (Gk. know, understand, perceive) all these things come to pass, *know* ye that the Kingdom of God is near". The idea is that we will understand clearly certain signs, and know *therefore* that the Lord is imminent. This all seems in marked contrast to the Lord's conclusion to the prophecy: "of that day and that hour *knoweth* no man". There is a marked connection here with the fact that he has just been saying that it will be possible to know once the signs are seen and understood. Surely he must be talking specifically to the twelve; *they* didn't *then* know the time, neither could they; but those who saw the signs by implication *would* know. In the context of these words about them not *then* knowing the day and hour, the Lord said that the believer *at the time of his return* who didn't know the day and hour of his coming would be found unprepared (Mt. 24:50). This is surely proof enough that the last generation *will* in some way know the day and hour, i.e. the appointed time (cp. Rev. 9:15), of the Lord's return. This point is a very powerful one.

When he does not know- This is *ginosko*, used of how the world of Noah's day did not "know" until all too late (:39). We are to "know" the time (:33 "know that it is near", "know this" :43; Lk. 21:31). And yet we cannot know the time in terms of a calendar date. Therefore we are to "know" the time in living according to the principle that the Lord *could* come imminently, at this very moment.

24:51 *And will cut him in pieces*- Gk. 'to cut him in two', literally 'to dichotomize'. This unreal and severe punishment- to cut a slave in half as punishment- emphasizes the extreme nature of the wrongdoing. This may also allude to the idea of cutting a covenant. The parties to the covenant passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifice and thereby proclaimed that they should be cut in two if they broke the covenant. These condemned persons, in this particular teaching, would therefore refer to those who had already entered covenant with God and are being judged for it. And the hint is that they broke that covenant because they preferred to be hypocrites, to look good in the eyes of men when their heart was somewhere else. The evil servant will be "cut asunder", i.e. his hypocrisy will be openly revealed for the first time (remember, he was an ecclesial elder in mortal life, according to the parable). There will be a public dimension to the judgment process, for the whole purpose of it is

for the learning of those present at it, rather than for God's benefit. What we have spoken in the Lord's ear will be revealed by him openly ("from the housetops") at the judgment (Lk. 12:3). When the righteous receive their inheritance (i.e. at the judgment), then the fool will be held up to shame (Prov. 3:35 NIV).

And put him with the hypocrites- AV "Appoint him his portion with the hypocrites". Christ "will appoint (the wicked servant) his portion with the unbelievers" (Lk. 12:46), his portion with the hypocrites (Mt. 24:51), reminiscent of a "goat" in the later parable being told to go to the group of goats at the left hand side- "the unbelievers", i.e. those responsible but lacking in real faith (the word is used concerning this group in Jn. 20:27; Mt. 17:20; Rom. 11:20; Heb. 3:12; Tit. 1:15; Rev. 21:8). Note the parallel between hypocrisy and faithlessness. It is faith which is the real power against hypocrisy; if we believe that the Lord sees and knows all things, we will not act in the eyes of some. We will be ourselves, because we believe in Him and His grace and love towards us. The Lord's self-indulgent servant will be cut asunder at judgment day- revealed for who he really is- and then be appointed his portion with the [other] hypocrites (Mt. 24:41). The Lord used almost identical words earlier in His ministry, but with the conclusion that such a servant would be appointed his portion with *the unbelievers* (Lk. 12:46). The rejected servants, who appeared to believe but who only play-acted, are in fact unbelievers. They have as little faith as the unbelieving world, although they think they believe and serve the Lord.

Just as the man had chosen to be "with [*meta*] the drunken" (:49), so the Lord's judgment of him will reflect the decisions he himself made, and the position in which he was found at the Lord's coming- he will be "with" [*meta*] the hypocrites.

There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth- This phrase is recorded seven times on the Lord's lips, but six of them are in Matthew (8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). The awful prospect clearly gripped Matthew, and in presenting the Gospel he felt it his duty to remind people graphically of the future they might miss, and the eternal consequence of rejecting God's Son.

The Olivet prophecy doesn't finish at the end of Mt. 24; the chapter break with chapter 25 is unfortunate. The context runs straight on. The Lord spoke a number of parables at the end of the prophecy, which teach us the need for watchfulness against his coming. Each of them speak of his "coming" and the state of his ecclesia. They refer back to various parts of the Olivet prophecy. *Without any doubt* their main relevance is to the second coming; whatever minor relevance they may have to AD70, when they speak of the Lord coming and judging us, they speak of his second coming. They are a further elaboration on the things of which he had

been speaking in the prophecy: and therefore the prophecy must basically concern his second coming and the state of the ecclesia at the time of the end.

CHAPTER 25

25:1- see on Mt. 13:19.

Then- Immediately after the judgment, we are told, "the Kingdom... will be likened unto ten virgins...", the implication being that *then* we will perceive the truths contained in that parable; only then will we fully appreciate the result of watchfulness and keeping oil in the lamps. "*Then* shall ye return, and discern [judge] between the righteous and the wicked" (Mal. 3:18) is spoken to the "ye" of Malachi 3 (e.g. v. 14) who refused to repent. God had asked them to repent, but their response was: "Wherein shall we *return*?" (Mal. 3:7). But in their final rejection, they would repent, all too late, and appreciate the basis of the Lord's condemnation: *they* will discern the crucial chasm between the righteous and the wicked, just as "*then* shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins..." (Mt. 25:1). Then, the wicked will understand the judgments of God. But it is our wisdom to learn and appreciate them now. The chapter division between Matthew 24 and 25 is unfortunate. The description of the rejected at the judgment given in Mt. 24:51 is followed straight on by Matthew 25:1: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven (i.e. entry into it) be likened unto ten virgins...". This may suggest that the rejected will have time for reflection - *then* they will see the 'likeness' between their position and the parable of the virgins. This parable follows that of the negligent steward who will be rejected at the judgment (Mt. 24:45), implying that a lack of proper spiritual care by the elders of the latter-day ecclesias results in the lack of oil in the lamps of the rejected.

If the judgment is in time as we now know it, we must be judged before Christ is enthroned, i.e. the Kingdom is established. But Mt. 25 teaches that we will come before Him *already enthroned* for judgment. The idea of "meeting" Christ at judgment employs a Greek phrase which distinctly means to go out to welcome a respected visitor. Its three Biblical occurrences are all in this context (Acts 28:14,15; 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Mt. 25:6,10). This would suggest that the faithful go out to meet the Lord and accompany Him to the judgment. But this is rather difficult to square with the idea of good and bad coming together before the judgment and being separated from each other *there*. It is almost as if these descriptions are designed to push the thoughtful reader away from seeing the judgment as occurring in real time! Christ comes with the saints to save Israel from their enemies. Unless there is a secret coming of Christ to gather and judge the saints and then he is revealed to the world, this just isn't possible. And the idea of a secret coming of the Lord of glory just cannot be reconciled with the clear descriptions of his coming in the NT. The coming of Christ in glory with the saints with him to establish the Kingdom *is* the coming of Christ. Therefore it would be fitting if the whole

process of Christ coming, resurrecting and judging his people, all happens in a moment of time as we know it. Depending how one reads the Hebrew text of Zech. 14:6,7, this idea of collapsed time at the Lord's return is Biblical: "It shall come to pass in that day, that it shall not be clear in some places, and dark in other places of the world; but the day shall be one, in the knowledge of the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light" (AV mg.). The RVmg. speaks of "the planets shall contract"- the times and seasons they control would somehow contract. Is. 21:12 RV has a similar idea, again in the context of a judgment day: "The morning is come and also the night". This collapsing of time would also explain why it is impossible to construct a chronology of events in real time for the coming of Christ; the various prophecies of the last days just don't seem to fit together in chronological sequence.

Shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins- Ten men were required for a synagogue to be formed. The Lord may be consciously subverting this idea, implying that in the new Israel He was creating, the congregations would be comprised of believing individuals, whose gender was unimportant.

Who took their lamps- Gk. 'they received'. The same word is used throughout the chapter, also of the servants receiving their talents (:16,18,20,22,24).

And went to meet the bridegroom- Our calling to the Kingdom is effectively a calling to go and meet the Lord. However, the parable seems to be specifically about the response of the faithful immediately prior to the Lord's coming, once they know He is 'back' and must of their own volition go out to meet Him. This would then follow straight on from the teaching of chapter 24. The same Greek word translated "meet" is that in 1 Thess. 4:17. The faithful who are alive at the time of Christ's coming will be snatched away to "meet" Him. But they will have gone forth to meet Him of their own volition, and those who delay going to meet Him will not meet Him in that way.

25:2 *And five of them were foolish and five were wise*- Dan. 12:3 speaks of "they that be wise... they that turn many to righteousness". This group of people are defined in Dan. 12:10 as "the wise" amongst latter day Israel who are purified and refined in the latter day time of Jacob's trouble such as never was for Israel. The very same phrase occurs in Dan. 11:35, where we read that some of these wise and understanding ones will perish during "the time of the end... the time appointed" (RV)- of the three and a half year tribulation? One wonders if the Lord had these "wise" in mind in His parable of the "wise virgins" of the latter days. This would all suggest that some amongst Israel will repent and zealously

preach in the last day tribulation, even if it costs them their lives. And Rev. 11 seems to be saying something similar.

Foolish- The Lord uses the same word in saying that we are not to call anyone 'foolish' because it implies that we are condemning them (Mt. 5:22). Clearly enough, the people of God are divided between those who will be saved, the wise, and those who will be condemned. But that division will only be apparent in the last day, and will be made apparent by varying responses to the knowledge that the Lord has finally come. Likewise the parable of the two builders shows that the difference between the wise and foolish will only be apparent when the flood comes, i.e. at the Lord's return. The foundation they built is invisible to those around them- nobody can see whether they dug down through the sand onto the rock, or just built in the sand.

25:3 *For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them*- The ten virgins each having lamps may connect with the parable of the ten servants each having the talents of the true knowledge of God (Lk. 19:13). Those who were "wise" had oil in their lamps; our Lord earlier defined "the wise" as those who truly obeyed the word (Mt. 7:24). By contrast, the "foolish" without oil are those who only superficially respond to it (Mt. 7:26). The parable of the talents following on from that of the oil lamps suggests that the talents- symbolic of our appreciation and application of the word- are to be equated with the oil. Those whose spiritual lamps go out during the tribulation "took no oil with them" after the first intimation that the second coming is about to occur (Mt. 25:3). Thus during the delay period they will rely on the feeling of hope that this intimation gives rather than on genuine spirituality. These contrasting attitudes are perhaps hinted at by the wise taking their oil first, *then* their lamps; whilst the foolish grabbed their lamps but discounted the need for more oil (Mt. 25:3,4). Thus those who presume too much upon their own personal worthiness, thinking that they are spiritually in "peace and safety" (1 Thess. 5:3), fail to properly apply themselves to the oil of the word.

However, it's quite likely that the oil has no particular significance. The idea is simply that the foolish take no oil because they are certain they know the day and hour of the bridegroom's coming; whereas the wise recognize that they do not know the exact day and hour, and therefore act accordingly by taking more oil in case there is a delay. This is exactly the point being made in the Lord's teaching at the end of chapter 24. Those who are convinced they know the day and hour, for whom the idea of flexibility or delay in the Lord's purpose is anathema, are in fact those who fall asleep and are caught unprepared.

25:4 *But the wise took flasks of oil along with their lamps*- The fact the lamps of the foolish 'went out' means that they all had oil in their lamps.

The difference was that the wise thought there might well be a delay, and so they took oil with them. The wise took lamps plus vessels; the foolish only took their lamps. The only other time the Greek word translated "vessels" occurs in the New Testament is also in Matthew and also on the lips of Jesus in a parable, in 13:48. There, the faithful are likened to good fish which the judge casts into "vessels" whilst the bad fish are cast away. The telling paradox is that the wise, those ultimately saved, are those who have "vessels" exactly because they suspect the oil of their own spirituality will not be enough. It is their awareness of their own likelihood of failure which is their salvation. And further, they recognize that the outworking of God's purpose is changeable- there may be delays, such is His sensitivity to human spirituality. The foolish, by contrast, think that all will be well with them because they accurately know the time of the bridegroom's coming, and cannot think that their own oil may not be enough. Personal spirituality [oil] is therefore related to our perception of God's sensitivity and openness.

25:5- see on Mt. 22:9.
Now while the bridegroom was delayed- The same word translated 'delay' in 24:48 (see note there). Without doubt, there is a delay in the Lord's return. Beyond question, the fact not all will work out as expected in terms of chronology means that some will stumble. This is a sober warning to the very many who hold dogmatic views about the interpretation of end time Bible prophecy. Rev. 10:6 uses a related word to speak of how there will finally be no more delay. And yet 'delay' is to some extent metaphor- the same word is used in Heb. 10:37 "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (s.w. "tarried", Mt. 25:5). In one sense there will be a delay, in another sense there will not be. God on one hand foreknows all things, and in that sense there is no delay; in another sense, He does in real terms delay His program in response and sensitivity to human behaviour. This paradox is at the root of Hab. 2:3, which is being quoted in Heb. 10:37: "The vision is yet for an appointed time [the Hebrew could mean 'Will still not happen for another year / *moed* / until the next feast / until the time appointed]… though it tarry, wait for it… it will not tarry". Despite the delay, it will fulfil, and so it must be waited for. It tarries in one sense, but in another sense "it will not tarry".

They all became drowsy and slept- The word is used figuratively of 'delaying'. The only other NT usage is in 2 Pet. 2:3, where it clearly means 'delaying': "Their condemnation *slumbers* not". Because the bridegroom delayed, so did they. Here again is the Lord's commentary upon the dangers of assuming a fixed date for His return. Spiritual life grinds to a halt when it is perceived [wrongly] that God's purpose has ground to a halt. The delay in the Lord's coming means that there is a delay in the spiritual life of those who waited for Him on a particular day. By slumbering, they were assuming that He too is slumbering. But the

God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:4). David had sworn not to slumber nor sleep until God was enthroned in Zion (Ps. 132:4). Regardless of delays in the program, it is the end result which must ever be kept in view- the coming of the Lord to Zion. The fulfilment of prophecy is not an end in itself, but it is the end result which must be our desire- rather than merely seeing the vindication of our own pet interpretations.

Both wise and foolish "*all* slumbered and slept". This slumbering can only be seen in a bad light. The exhortation at the end of the parable is to "watch", i.e. to keep awake rather than be sleepy (Mt. 25:13). We have earlier commented on the many parallels between 1 Thess. 5 and Mt. 24 and 25. 1 Thess. 5:2,6,7 speaks of the unworthy in the last days as being surprised by the midnight coming of Christ due to their being asleep. Their being "drunken in the night" (1 Thess. 5:7) matches the similar description of the weak elements of the latter-day ecclesias in Mt. 24:49. And yet 1 Thess. 5 goes on in this context to say that Christ died for us so that whether we wake or sleep, we may be accepted with Him. This is positivism beyond measure; He *wants* to save even those who slumber. Clearly enough, the very last generation of believers will all be weak, and those of them who shall be saved will only be 'ready' because of their own admission of their weakness and lack of oil.

That *all* the girls should fall asleep whilst awaiting the bridegroom is unusual- an element of unreality in the story. They must have been a pretty unenthusiastic, switched off bunch. And yet immediately we are led by the Lord to pass judgment upon ourselves- which is quite a feature of the parables, e.g. Mt. 21:31; Lk. 7:43 (as it is elsewhere- consider 2 Sam. 12:5; 14:8; 1 Kings 20:40). Note how there is surely a similar element of unreality in the Lord's description of *all* those invited to the dinner refusing the invitation (Lk. 14:18,24). Would really *nobody* respond to such a gracious invitation? This was the obvious question that He begged in the minds of His hearers. The intention being that each hearer would reflect: "Is it I…?"… maybe at least *I* could respond to the call of the Gospel… Christ's low expectations of us are clearly demonstrated when He told the parables of the weddings. When you put them together, you get this picture: God made the wedding between Christ and us. The invited guests didn't bother coming, for very trivial, mundane reasons that they put in front of the honour of being invited to His wedding. Only tramps and beggars come to it, motivated selfishly by the thought of a free meal (cp. a penny for the day). But we, the bride, aren't ready (although Christ graciously doesn't mention that in the parable), and so He delays to come to the wedding. Back home, His most trusted household servants realize that He's delaying His return, and start to get drunk and beat each other. The excited young bridesmaids lose their enthusiasm and go to sleep. Eventually, the wedding happens, but some of the guests don't bother to turn up in a wedding garment, just

in their filthy rags. The impression is clearly this: *the whole thing's a mess!* Yet this is the marriage of the Son of God to His dearly purchased bride, for whom He died, and lived a life of total self-control. Yet He *knew* the whole thing would be such a mess. See on Mt. 13:25.

25:6 *But at midnight*- Israel both kept Passover and went through the Red Sea at night. Indeed, it is stressed six times in Ex. 12 that it was "night", and hence Dt. 16:1 reminds them to carefully keep the Passover (i.e. at night), "for... thy God brought thee forth out of Egypt by night". Other latter day prophecies speak of the events of the second coming being at "night": Lot left Sodom in the very early hours of the morning; and it was "at midnight (that) there was a cry made" informing the virgins of their Lord's return (Mt. 25:6). There can be little doubt that the parable is intended to have a specific latter-day application. And yet there is a general application of the parable to all believers who at the time of their baptism have oil in their lamps- which needs continual topping up by our freewill effort. The virgins "took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Mt. 25:1), but settled down to slumber due to his unexpected delay. Then "at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mt. 25:6). The whole of the believer's probation should therefore be in the spirit of a journey to the judgment / wedding, believing that Christ is at the door. The 'arising' of the virgins in Mt. 25:7 would then refer to the resurrection.

There was a cry- This is surely representative of some specific indication given to the latter day believers that the Lord is back and they must now exercise their freewill in going to meet Him. It may be in the form of a trumpet blast. The book of Revelation often uses the same word for the 'crying' of Angels in their various proclamations. So this may refer to the "voice of an Archangel" (1 Thess. 4:16) with which the Lord returns. This great cry also equates with the "shout" of 1 Thess. 4:17 at the Lord's return and the resurrection. From this it follows that the faithful will have a separate gathering to judgment than the unworthy; Christ "shall gather together his *elect*" (Mt. 24:31), the unworthy then wish to be with those who have oil, putting their noses in a Bible for a change, and *then* come to the judgment. The wise trim their lamps and go to meet Jesus. The same Greek word translated 'trim' is rendered 'adorned' in Rev. 21:2, concerning the bride of Christ (the wise virgins) "coming down from God out of Heaven (a literal descent from the sky, having been snatched away in clouds?), prepared as a bride *adorned* for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). The intimation that the second coming is imminent could be due to a number of factors:

- The open presence of 'Elijah'. The cry of the watchman would be in the spirit of the Elijah prophet.
- The possible possession of the miraculous spirit gift by the Elijah ministry.

- The onset of active persecution
- The Arab domination of Israel
- Possibly the appearance of a literal sign in the heavenly bodies heralding the Lord's coming; the sign of the Son of man.

Look! The bridegroom [comes]! Come out to meet him- "Comes" translates *erchomai* and "go out" is *ex-erchomai*. The coming of Christ must be greeted by our 'coming out' to meet Him. The idea is that we cannot be merely passive. The whole parable is designed to debunk the idea that we can know the exact date of the Lord's return, with the implication that we are just waiting for things to happen to us. But God's purpose involves us having a hand in the outworking of it; He is responsive to our freewill attitudes and decisions. His coming / going out to us cannot just be waited for by us; we have to go out to Him. The virgins had all 'gone out' to meet the bridegroom (:1 s.w.), but now they actually go out to meet Him after the delay. And it is the response to how the Lord delays which is effectively the division between wise and foolish, worthy and unworthy.

The same Greek word translated "meet" in Mt. 25:6 concerning the wise virgins going out to "meet" Christ occurs also in 1 Thess. 4:17: "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up... in the clouds to *meet* the Lord in the air". The picture is therefore presented of the righteous obeying the call of their own volition, and then being confirmed in this by being 'snatched away' to meet Christ in the (literal) air. We will then travel with Christ "in the clouds" (literally) to judgment in Jerusalem. In no way, of course, does this suggestion give countenance to the preposterous Pentecostal doctrine of being 'raptured' into heaven itself. Every alternative interpretation of 1 Thess. 4:17 seems to run into trouble with the phrase "meet the Lord *in the air*". 1 Thessalonians is not a letter given to figurative language, but rather to the literal facts of the second coming.

25:7 *Then all those virgins arose and*- In the general application of the parable, this invites interpretation as resurrection. But the burden of the parable is clearly specifically for those who live in the last days, those who are "alive and remain" and are called to meet their Lord, but find there is a delay. The more obvious picture, however, is that the call will grab all by surprise, and will lead to them arising and taking stop of their lives, and coming to terms with who they really are. Again, this is relevant to the closing section of the Olivet prophecy- the Lord's point is that even if they think they know the day and hour of His coming, it will be a shock which can in no way be prepared for. And knowing the day and hour is not the essential thing, but rather being willing to immediately go to Him and leave the things of this world.

Trimmed their lamps- This is the same word translated "garnished" in the Lord's parable about how response to John the Baptist's teaching left a

house “garnished” (12:44). And his teaching was about Jesus as Christ and the need for repentance and faith in His grace. Those who properly responded to it would be ready for the Lord’s second coming. The whole language of Jesus as bridegroom was surely intended to recall John, for he had used the very same figure for the Lord. The introduction to the Olivet prophecy had noted that the temple was “garnished” (s.w. “trimmed”; Lk. 21:5), and the Lord is surely saying that that was irrelevant, for the true garnishing is of personal preparedness for His coming. The bride herself is to be “adorned [s.w.] for her husband”, the bridegroom (Rev. 21:2).

25:8 *And the foolish said to the wise: Give us some of your oil*- Those who thought they knew the day and hour of the Lord’s coming are revealed here as actually having no personal spirituality. They could have just gone to meet their Lord for joy of wanting to see Him, throwing themselves upon His grace. A bridegroom wants to see His bride and would rather see her without some piece of jewellery, than find she turns up very late. Their request for oil from others indicates they have no personal love of Him, no personal relationship with Him, and a group mentality whereby they thought others’ spirituality could count for theirs. All they had was their conviction that they knew the day and hour of His coming. So it’s no surprise when finally the Lord tells them “I know you not” (:12). This puts all obsession about figuring out Bible prophecy into correct perspective.

For our lamps are going out- Apparently the "lamps" which the parable is based upon had to be replenished every 15 minutes or else they went out. The "wise" (relative to the foolish, anyway) can therefore be pictured as dozing for five or 10 minutes, then jolting back into consciousness and refilling their lamps, while the foolish snored on. This presents a powerful picture of the frail spirituality which will characterise the faithful remnant just prior to the second coming. The Lord asks the faithful remnant to "look up, and lift up your heads" (Lk. 21:28) when the signs of the last days just *begin* to come to pass. There seems a designed connection with this parable of the virgins, spoken only minutes later: in actual fact, he foresaw that *even at His coming*, even the faithful would be sleeping. Even now our real faith is but as candles in the wind. There is an urgent need for us each to analyse and appreciate what real spirituality is, to spotlight the few times and ways in which we show it, and to work on these. Such self-knowledge and realisation will be worth its weight in diamonds during the delay period. This said, it will ultimately be the midnight cry which reveals our true spiritual state to us. Each virgin arose and with heightened awareness analysed the state of their oil. The wise will have the faith to quickly prepare themselves to meet Christ- they "trimmed their lamps", pulling out the burnt strands in the wick and adding oil. The foolish panic- "Give us of your oil"! In that

moment it will be evident to all in the ecclesia who has been wise and who foolish. Those who are spiritually empty will then realize their folly; the parable even suggests that they desperately try to associate themselves with those they know to be spiritually stronger, somehow hoping that they might be covered by their spirituality. "Our lamps are going out" (Mt. 25:8 R.V.) shows that they are not totally without oil, but they feel the oil- what faith they had- ebbing away as the reality of Christ's return and the judgment dawns upon them.

25:9 *But the wise answered: Perhaps there will not be enough for us and you*- AV "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you". The translation is problematic, as reflected by the way the AV puts "not so" in italics. This has been added in a valiant bid to make the difficult Greek have at least some kind of sense. The idea seems to more accurately be: 'In any case there is not sufficient for us, let alone for you too'. The only other time *arkeo ou* occurs it is translated "not sufficient" (Jn. 6:7); and there, the idea is 'We cannot possibly have sufficient of ourselves, only God's grace can provide the sufficiency'. As it is translated in most English versions, the sense is somewhat selfish- as if the wise are too concerned for their own acceptance by the bridegroom to worry about anyone else. But I suggest the sense of the original is rather 'We ourselves hardly have any oil, we are woefully unprepared ourselves, we are going to throw ourselves onto His grace when we meet Him. It's not about how much oil we have. It's about loving Him enough and trusting His grace enough to just want to go immediately and be with Him. But if you're so worried about oil, well, presumably you will have to go and get some- a hard job, in the middle of the night, when the shops are all closed'.

Instead, you should go- The Greek really means 'to depart', and significantly, the very same word is used by the Lord in this same context when condemning people at judgment day in :41: "Depart [s.w. "go"] from Me, you cursed". So the point is again established that in their response to the news of His return, the rejected have their judgment. They are asked to go and meet Him, but they depart, to try to make themselves prepared by relying upon others ["them that sell"]. Their departing from the Lord was in essence their condemnation, for condemnation is all about departing from the Lord.

To them that sell oil and buy some for yourselves- This may well be obeyed by the foolish in the form of getting their noses down to some serious, personal Bible study for a change; or going looking for *people* who could sell them oil. But again, they go to others- rather than immediately to the Lord Himself. Hence His comment in :12 that they do not know Him, and therefore He doesn't know them. There is simply a lack of personal relationship with Him, despite their confidence that they knew the day and hour of His coming. "Go... and buy" is surely rhetorical- the rejected know it's too late for them to actually rectify their position,

but the process of judgment day will show the rejected how it would have been possible to enter the Kingdom. Likewise the Lord will tell the one talent man: 'Why didn't you, for example, put the money into the bank...?'. I mentioned under *Not so*… that the only other time *arkeo ou* ["not enough"] occurs is when the amount of bread required was described as "not sufficient" (Jn. 6:7). The advice to *go and buy for yourselves* is also alluding to that same feeding miracle. The lesson then had been that no amount of bread was enough / sufficient, nor was it possible to go and buy for oneself- rather must there be total reliance upon God's grace in Christ. I feel the allusion or similarity is purposeful, because lack of oil didn't have to mean rejection by the Bridegroom. They could simply have thrown themselves upon His grace. If they were ready and eager to go and meet Him at any moment, regardless of whether they felt or externally appeared ready, then this was enough for salvation. And that, really, will be the struggle of every spiritual heart when we know the Lord has returned; our love for Him and trust in His grace must be greater than our awareness of our own unworthiness, lack of preparation and poor external appearance. Those who thought they knew the day and hour [and we must ever remember that this is the context of the parable] couldn't cope with things working out other than they had expected, needed to run to others for help, rather than to the Lord personally; and had no sense of His grace nor, in fact, any overpowering desire to simply be with Him. Rather was their own correctness of expectation the most significant self-defining issue for them. And it would appear so many 'Christians' have fallen into this trap, becoming obsessed with chronologies of events and accuracy of prophetic interpretation, at the expense of true spirituality and direct personal relationship with the Lord.
Buy for yourselves- Literally, 'redeem yourselves'. The whole point is that we were bought / redeemed by the Lord and not by ourselves.

25:10 *And while they went away to buy*- There seems no reason to think that the Bridegroom would have rejected them because their lamp was not burning. They could have just gone along anywhere, motivated by the joy that comes from love. But they were too convinced by their need to *appear* ready externally. I have spoken elsewhere of a collapsing of time [as we understand it] in the period around the Lord's return and judgment. But let us not think that such collapsing of time only means that what would otherwise take a long time actually takes a short time. It may be that what is in fact a very short time feels like much longer. Thus we read here of the rejected as foolish virgins going to get oil, and it taking so long that the door was shut and they were eternally outside the marriage. In time as we know it, this may just be a momentary desire to have been more filled with the Spirit in the day of opportunity. But the whole process of realising this will *feel* to them as if it takes a long time to work out.

The bridegroom came- and they that were ready- "You- be also ready" (24:44) uses the same word. This parable is the definition of what 'readiness' means. The wise virgins were hardly ready. They fell asleep when they should have stayed awake; and they recognized that they didn't really have enough oil. They hadn't calculated the day nor hour of their Lord's return. They were 'ready' only in the sense that they wanted above all to be with their Lord, and this sense was far stronger than their deep awareness of their own shameful unpreparedness. But this is what 'readiness' is about.
Went in with Him to the wedding- This is another hint that the faithful come with Jesus to judgment. See Digression *With Jesus to Judgment*. The Lord entering into the wedding feast is the exact picture of His coming in judgment (22:11 "the King *came in*" s.w. "went in"). But in that same parable, we 'come in' to the wedding feast at our response to the Gospel in this life (22:12 s.w.). The nature of our initial response is highly significant. "Went in" translates the same Greek word found in 24:38: "Noah *entered into* the ark". The next comment that "the door was shut" continues that allusion to the ark.

Went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut- The very same words are used in Lk. 11:7 concerning how although the door is shut in this life, yet it can be opened by prayer and beseeching. We as sinners are condemned here and now, the door is shut- but we can repent and pray, and the door shall be opened. But like the shutting of the door of the ark, once this is done at the day of judgment, it is too late. Now is the day to change the verdict, then will be too late.

25:11 *Afterward came also*- We may be intended to imagine some details of the story. They would have searched for oil sellers in the middle of the night, and finding none, they came without oil to their Lord. I suggested earlier that the issue is readiness, a love for the Lord, rather than having oil; they could have gone immediately and thrown themselves on His grace. But they didn't do that and chose instead to try to get human help; resulting in their rejection.

The other virgins- If the Lord literally meant 'the others', He would have used a Greek word like *heteros* [or the Aramaic equivalent].
But *loipoi* definitely has the sense of that or those which remain; it is elsewhere translated "the things which remain" (Rev. 3:2). The foolish virgins are those who remained, those who didn't go immediately in response to the call. Yet again, attitudes to the Lord's coming will decide our eternal futures.

Saying: Lord, Lord- The Lord had warned that saying "Lord, Lord" would not guarantee "entry" into the Kingdom (7:21). And here He is speaking about exactly such "entry"- the same word is used here in :10 "they that were ready *went in* with Him to the wedding". The category in view are those who considered themselves believers, who thought that externally

correct forms of address would impress the Lord Jesus. The “Lord, Lord” contingent indeed had “done many wonderful works” (7:22), but they had never known and loved *Him*. Whilst organized church life is a necessary part of our present experience and the Lord’s intention, the danger is that it can exalt such “works” and public appearances to the point that personal relationship with the Lord is totally eclipsed.

Lk. 13:25 adds the detail that they ‘knocked’. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that hated knowledge". The foolish virgins realize the need for prayer all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. They were so convinced they knew the day and hour that prayer for the Lord’s return, and prayer to Him generally, somehow was overlooked or felt to be unnecessary.

Open to us- The foolish virgins, for all their initial spiritual confidence shown by not taking oil with them, lacked that true love for Christ's appearing which enabled the wise to immediately go forth to meet him. This accords with the description of the righteous as opening the door *immediately* in response to the 'knock' of the second coming (Lk 12:36). "Lord, Lord, open to us" is met with the response "I know you not"; and this connects with an earlier picture of the rejected at judgment day: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Mt. 7:22,23). Thus there is the implication that when the foolish virgins delay their going to meet Christ, they amass a list of "many wonderful works" which they hope will impress their Lord. This would explain the indignation of the rejected at Christ's rebuke of their lack of suitable works (Mt. 25:41-45). These people would probably not have appeared reprobates in this life; works are so impressive to ones' fellow believers. Jesus did not tell this parable about five hookers and five virgins; *all* of them were 'virgins' in the parable, having an appearance of purity from being in Christ. By contrast, "the wise", whose love for Christ makes them respond immediately to the call, are unconscious of their works of faith (Mt. 25:35-40). "Lord, open to us" is therefore to be read as a confident demand by the unworthy for entry into the Kingdom, based upon trust in their "wonderful works". "I know you not" is paralleled with a lack of oil. The Lord knows His people through their attitude to the oil; whether they have enough or not, or whether they think they do or think they do not, is all so irrelevant. The essence is in wanting the Lord’s return.

25:12 *But he answered and said: Truly I say to you, I do not know you*- Lk. 13:25 adds “From whence you are”, from what nation or ethnicity. They were complete strangers, speaking another language. The intended

paradox is in that those who were so confident they knew the day and hour actually did not know it (:13), and did not know Christ. They thought knowing the day and hour was the same as knowing Christ; or at least, they put the two together in their minds as one and the same. But they are not. And that is the point of this parable, which is sandwiched in between warnings that we do not and cannot know the day and hour- but we are invited to know Christ personally.

25:13 *Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know the day nor the hour*- "Let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6) matches our Lord's "Watch, therefore" (Mt. 25:13). This command to watch seems to have a conscious connection with the Lord's urgent plea to the sleepy disciples in Gethsemane to "watch and pray" (Mt. 26:38), indicating that they at that time typify the latter day believers; about to fellowship their Lord's sufferings during the tribulation period, confused, failing to see the urgency of the situation. The disciples doubtless started to obey their Lord's command to watch and pray, but then drifted off into sleep. Watching and praying are often associated; a real *knowing* of God through dynamic prayer is the real way to be watchful for the second coming. The foolish virgins realize this all too late; they knocked on the door with great zeal, asking for it to be opened; seeking but not finding. Knocking is sometimes used as a figure for prayer (Mt. 7:7). The basis for these foolish virgins is surely in Prov. 1:28,29: "Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer... they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge".

It cannot be accidental that Matthew's Gospel twice records Christ's plea for us to watch (Mt. 24:42; 25:13); and then goes straight on to describe how in Gethsemane, Christ pleaded with the disciples to join Him in watching and praying, lest they fall to temptation (Mt. 26:38-41). He was evidently deeply, deeply disappointed that they could not share this with Him. Surely the reason for this further mention of watching is to suggest that in the pain of our latter day watching, we will be at one with our suffering Lord in Gethsemane, as He too watched- not "signs of the times", but His own relationship with the Father, desperately seeking strength to carry the cross rather than quit the race.

25:14 *For it is as when a man, going into another country*- The same word is used in the parable of the tenants (21:33), and also at the end of the Olivet prophecy in describing the Son of Man travelling into a far country and leaving His servants to watch, not knowing exactly when He shall return (Mk. 13:34). The parables of Matthew 25 are an extension of the Olivet prophecy and appear to comment particularly upon the fact we do not know the exact time of the Lord's return but are to live as if He is coming any moment. The key phrase in this parable, in this connection, is the idea of the Lord returning to assess the servants "after a long time" or delay (see on :19). It may be that the Lord foresaw the rescheduling of

His intended return in the first century, and wanted to teach that regardless of the delay, His servants were to keep 'ready' and watching by trading the goods He entrusted them with, and progressing His work on the earth. In one sense, the Lord Jesus is very present. The teaching of the Comforter passages in Jn. 14-16 is that through the Spirit, He is as good as personally present with us. And yet He is apparently absent, in that we no longer possess the miraculous gifts, and it visibly appears that He is far away. The metaphor of a man travelling into a far country is a sign of His recognition that on one level, that is indeed how it will appear to us. And clearly the idea is based upon the experience of absent landlords, who left their estates in the hands of their servants and went away to enjoy the good life in some better part of the Roman empire. Such landlords were despised as non-patriotic and disinterested in the welfare of their people. And yet the Lord consciously employs this image concerning Himself. He is not ultimately like that, but through this choice of imagery He gives a nod of recognition towards the fact that indeed this is how it will appear to some. Joseph likewise appeared tough and disinterested to his brothers, when beneath that mask his heart was bursting for them; His whole plan of action was simply to lead them to repentance.

Called his own servants- A picture of how the Lord considers us to be His very own.

And delivered to them His goods- The same word is used about how all things have been delivered unto the Son by the Father ("All things are delivered to me from My Father", Lk. 10:22). The totality of the action is the element of unreality- that this Master would share out all He had amongst His servants, when He Himself was not present to oversee their work. Again, this is metaphor. He is present. But He is 'absent' in the sense that He will not forcibly intervene to ensure that His work prospers in our hands. He has left us with absolute freewill and self-determination. In a different metaphor, Paul likens the community of believers to the body of Christ. we are Him, and without us, He is not. We each have part of His work, some aspects of His characteristics, which we are to develop and reveal in the world. The most common usage of *paradidomi* concerning what has been delivered to us is in the context of "That form of doctrine" which has been "delivered" to us (Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:2,23; 15:3 2 Pet. 2:21; "the faith which was once delivered to the saints", Jude 3)- not to simply keep buried, but to develop in various ways, to the glory of the Lord who gave it. Thus the basic doctrines of the Faith were "delivered" to us at our conversion, as the talents were delivered to the servants. We are asked to use that understanding of basics to develop our own character. It doesn't mean we're each given different doctrines; but we all have different characters and areas of spiritual growth, and we must each use the same doctrines we are "delivered" to develop these. This would explain why it's so easy to see

others' lack of spiritual development in some areas, whilst being so sure that we have grown spiritually in other areas. Our observation is correct; this *is* the case. But it's nothing to be proud or critical about; we ourselves have our blind spots. This approach to the parables of the pounds and talents may also explain why brethren of past generations seemed so strong in some areas (e.g. defence of the Faith and preaching) but so weak in others (e.g. compassion).

"His goods" follows on from the Lord's word that "He shall make him ruler over all his goods" (24:47 s.w.). What we are faithful with now will be in some sense eternally given to us in the Kingdom age. We will each have *all* the Master's goods, and the description in the next parable of those goods being distributed between us in this life (Mt. 24:47). In the Kingdom we will no longer know partially, as a result of seeing parts of the whole picture; we will see face to face (1 Cor. 13:9,12 Gk.). The talents here are the pounds of the similar parable in Luke 19, His very *own* (Lk. 19:23). Here in the parable of the talents we read of the servants as "His own". The Lord's personal identity with His servants and His goods could not be more stressed. This is no disinterested business transaction. The goods of Christ are those which He took from the devil (Mt. 12:29), the absolute righteousness which is possible once sin is bound. I would suggest the goods of Christ refer to the ultimate spirituality which He has, the various aspects of His character. The ten pounds are delivered to the ten servants, who are to be compared with the ten virgins of Mt. 25. The ten servants and ten virgins represent the body of Christ, each of whom has been given a part of Christ's "own" to develop; we are called to develop His likeness, and I am suggesting that each of us has been given a certain amount and aspect of His perfectly righteous character to develop. The unworthy calls what he has been given "...yours" (Mt. 25:25)- when it was intended to be *his* personally (cp. Mt. 20:14). He just didn't let himself see the wonderfully personal nature of what God had given him.

25:15 *And to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one*- This is one of the most programmatic, persistent and widespread translational problem in the New Testament. A talent is a weight, a measure. The Lord did not have in view 'talent' as in the natural ability in a particular area which a person may have. These talents are given to us by Him when we are called to Him; they are not something we had of ourselves. A Roman talent weighed 71 pounds or 32.2 kg. The servants were given *His* goods; something they previously did not have was given to them. And to each servant was weighed out a different amount, suggesting that gold or silver is in view. The use of *argurion* in :18 confirms it is silver. The suggestion that the one talent could have been left with the bank in order to receive interest confirms that a precious metal is in view. The figures are large- 32 kg. of silver for the one talent man. The story line of the parable suggests he thought he had not been

given much- but 32 kg. of silver is a huge amount. Even if we think we have little or no capacity for service, we need to consider that in fact we have been given a huge amount. And the five talent man was given 160 kg. of silver. As I write this in 2014, 1 kg. of silver is worth around 700 US$. The one talent man was therefore given the equivalent of around 22,000 $. And he considered it not enough to do anything much with. The story line suggests that many of us have been given far more than one talent. The five talent man was therefore given something like 110,000 $. This is all a picture of the great riches in Christ which are given to us- each one of us. The relative lack of guidance they were given, with their Lord leaving immediately and leaving them to get on with it, is an insightful picture into how *so* much has been delegated to us to get on with according to our own initiative, and how we are tempted to think we have not really been given that much. And it's a powerful statement of what huge potential we have.

The parables several times speak of the relationship between our Master and ourselves. They do so in somewhat unreal and arresting terms. It would've made everyone think when the Lord spoke of how a master handed over a total of eight talents to His servants and told them to use them as best they could. This was, humanly speaking, a huge and unreal risk for a master to take. He *so* trusted those servants! And so much has the Lord delegated to each of us, entrusting us with the Gospel. And we can imagine His joy when they lived up to the trust He placed in them. We can also imagine them walking away from their meeting with Him, wondering why ever He had entrusted so much to them, feeling nervous, praying for strength to act responsibly and zealously. The talent was worth 6,000 denarii, i.e. 20 years' wages for the workers in the parable of the labourers (Mt. 10:1-16). In 2014 the average annual income in the USA was 50,000$- 20 years wages would therefore be $1 million in dynamic terms. For one talent. But most of the Lord's servants are given more than one talent. Looked at in this way, the church is a millionaire's club. The element of unreality in the story is that this is a huge and unrealistic amount to give to a servant to have responsibility for! But this is the huge responsibility which passes to us in having been called to the Gospel. Likewise, what human Owner of a vineyard who give out his vineyard to *other* tenants, after the first lot had proven so wicked, and killed not only His servants but His beloved Son? But this speaks of God's amazing desire to keep on delegating His affairs to frail mortals. And just as people typically fail to manage large sums of money which they are unaccustomed to, so we too miserably mismanage the Lord's wealth. But it was and is His will that we should use our own initiative in progressing His work and managing His wealth.

Note how valuable just one talent was- equivalent to 20 years earnings of a working man. This seems to me to be an element of unreality in the story, that flags up a lesson. The point is, we have been entrusted with

a *huge* amount. We tend to see it as something ordinary; that we have a faith, a denomination, just like many others do. But the personal, individualized gift which we have been given is simply *huge*. Imagine if you were given say $1 million to use for the Lord's service. You'd be quite busy working out how to spend it all. But the point is, we have each been given *far more* than this. The parable has specific application to our witness; for it was just prior to the Lord's departure that He gave us the great preaching commission, corresponding to how in the parable, the Master leaves His servants but just beforehand, gives His servants the talents to go and trade with. Hence the one talent man is criticized for not having lent the talent on usury, a practice which Jews could only practice with Gentiles. He should've taken his talent, the riches of the Gospel, to the Gentiles. And yet I'd suggest that 21st century disciples aren't one talent people. We have been given *so* much- not least literacy and having the Bible in our own native languages.

To each- This idea is repeated and alluded to so often in the New Testament. Each man shall be judged individually according to his works because to each servant something has been given, and he must answer for its usage (16:27). This parable leads on from the Olivet discourse, which concluded with the Lord's teaching about the household which "the Son of Man" departed from, "and gave authority to his servants, and to every man [s.w.] his work" (Mk. 13:34). In a culture where religious specialists were thought to be God's workers, this was a radical teaching- that each and every one of us has been given specific work to do. And the culture of our present age is a no less difficult one into which to introduce this teaching. Our fear of responsibility, our desire to retreat deep within ourselves, to live only semi-aware lives in an age of abstraction and minimalism… all this makes it difficult to accept that we have been given specific work to do, for which we shall be judged at the last day. 'Every man… each of you' is a very common term in the New Testament, seeking to persuade people of their personal connection with God and Jesus, and not to rely on mere group membership. Hence "Be baptized *every one of you*… in turning away *every one of you* from his sins" (Acts 2:38; 3:26) would appear redundant until we realize this personal appeal that was necessary against a culture of group mentality.
Analysing the later NT allusions to this term "to every man", we have an insight into what in practice the talents may represent. God has "dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3); we have each been given a specific ministry, and according to Romans 12, we are to develop that ministry. If we have no idea what that ministry is, what hopes the Lord has for us, we need to earnestly ask Him to reveal it to us. But if we're not perceiving it, this may well be because we don't want to perceive it. On a more obvious level, it may be that faith itself is a gift of God, and different people are given different amounts of it- but we are to develop whatever we are given and not leave the potential dormant. This would explain the great diversity of spiritual levels and of faith which there

clearly is within the body of believers. Life and especially psychological and spiritual life is not experienced by each person on an even playing field. There are background factors which affect how easy it is for a person to believe; and the Lord is aware of this and will judge accordingly.

When we read of how "the Lord gave to each man" (1 Cor. 3:5 s.w.) we have a very clear allusion to the parable. But the context is of how the Lord 'gave' converts to both Paul and Apollos. This too is a gift which we must use. Some make much brave effort to preach and never win a single convert. Others seem to keep stumbling across folks eager to hear and respond to the message. But that is all a gift from the Lord, for us to use and develop. And so the testing of 'each man's work' in the day of judgment will be a testing of the quality and extent to which they have worked with people (1 Cor. 3:8,10,13). Another allusion to this part of the parable is in 1 Cor. 7:7, where singleness or marital situation is described as "every man has his *idios* gift [s.w. "his own / *idios* ability / power"]… one [this way]… one [that way]". This is the same wording used in speaking of how this one was given five talents, that one was given two talents. As God has distributed to and called every man, so we are to develop our lives in that calling (1 Cor. 7:17), whether as slaves, single people, married or whatever. Many lament their marital situation, considering that if only it were otherwise, they would be able to serve God better. But it is in fact a gift from God, to be used for Him.

1 Cor. 12:7,11,18 again allude to the parable in saying that the gift of the Spirit "is given to every man… the Spirit… dividing to every man *idios*, personally". The talents therefore refer to the Spirit, spiritual gifts to be used within the body of Christ- so the passage continues. Likewise "unto every one of us is given grace" (Eph. 4:7). "Grace", *charis*, does indeed mean simply a gift. But it is so often used in the context of God's forgiveness that we can overlook the obvious fact that the gifts of God to us are His recurrent acts of patient forgiveness, given so freely to "every man" in Christ. These gifts of grace, and so many other such gracious gifts, are to not merely be *accepted* but developed and used. Again in allusion to this parable, Peter pleaded: "As every man [s.w.] has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10).

According to his abilities- The Lord recognizes that we each have unique abilities in some areas- and thereby unique inabilities in others. And He gives us work to do according to those abilities and not according to our inabilities. It may be that understanding of 'correct doctrine' is a gift given to one and not another; because not all are wired as Bible students. The giving of such different gifts, in different amounts, suggests that there can never be uniformity of spiritual level or achievement in the church. And yet so much church structure, hope, intention and expectation is

geared towards achieving such uniformity. We each start at a different point and much more is expected of those who start further down the road. *Kata… dunamis* is the very phrase Paul uses in 2 Cor. 8:3 in commending some brethren for responding to others' needs "according to their ability [*kata… dunamis*], yes, and beyond their ability". Surely this is an allusion to the Lord's words here. The point is that the Lord understands our ability and asks us to work according to that; but those brethren excelled themselves in that they responded beyond what the Lord even expected or hoped for from them.

The goods are distributed "to every man according to his several (Gk. *idios*, individual, s.w. "private") ability" (Mt. 25:15). We each have our own private spirituality which we must develop in our own private way. The talents parable is alluded to in 1 Cor. 12:7-12: "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each man (RV) to profit withal". In the first century, this was seen in the way in which different believers were given different gifts of the Spirit. In our dispensation, each of us is called to manifest a different aspect of the Lord Jesus, the Lord the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). But the principle of 1 Cor. 12:7-12 remains true, as indicated by the way Paul reasons that we each have a different aspect of the Spirit to manifest because "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... and have been all made to drink into one Spirit". In principle, these words are true of our baptisms. At baptism we were given our talents, our different aspects of the Spirit / mind of Christ to manifest. We are all in the Christ body, and manifest His spirit / mind in different aspects. And as the manifestation of different aspects of the Spirit in the first century caused frictions, so too today.

However, there is no equivalent of the pronoun "his" in the Greek text here. *The Lord* gave the talents to the three servants "according to his own power and immediately took his journey". The 'he' in view could quite easily be the Lord, and the 'His… ability / power' would then refer to that of the Lord. This is rather confirmed by the recurrence of *kata… dunamis* in Paul's writings [which allude once every three verses at least to the Lord's words in the Gospels, especially His parables]. "*Kata* the gift… given unto me *kata*… His power [*dunamis*]" (Eph. 3:7)… that He would give you, *kata*… the might [*dunamis*] through His Spirit" (Eph. 3:16). "He that is of power [*dunamai*]… *kata* the power [*dunamis*] that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). Each of these verses associates *kata… dunamis* with the *gift* of the Lord, and the same word is used as in the parable for the giving of the talents to believers. Note too 2 Tim. 1:8 "*Kata* the power [*dunamis*] of God".

I suggest there is a purposeful ambiguity of meaning here. We are given some aspects of the Lord's goods according to *our* power / ability, and in order to develop them and use them we are given *His* power / ability. For His Spirit is to be merged with our spirit. Maybe Paul appreciated this

when he wrote: “I also labour *kata* His working, which works in me with power [*dunamis*]” (Col. 1:29).

And he went on his journey- Perhaps an element of unreality in the story. For we would expect Him to train them and explain to them how He intends the wealth to be used. The one talent man’s response at the end suggests that he had not been given any clear commands by his Lord as to how to use his one talent. But this is the point. We have been given the talents we have, and we are to use them- at our initiative, and not in response to a legal code which defines how we use them. And therefore one believer will make more than another out of what God gives.

The same word for ‘took his journey’ has just been used by the Lord at the end of the Olivet prophecy in saying that the Son of Man ‘took a far journey’ and “left His house” (Mk. 13:34). The leaving of His house surely connects with the introduction to the Olivet prophecy, in which the Lord stated that “Your house is left unto you desolate” (23:38). It was no longer His house, but theirs. And in departing from the temple, He was leaving the house of Israel. The structure of Judaism was no longer going to be used- instead, He would give His wealth to a few individual servants and leave it to their initiative what they did with it. And this is what was and is so hard for so many- to serve the Lord on our initiative, without religious, legalistic structures. And these are [re]built exactly because people generally struggle with the calling to take ownership and responsibility for what the Lord has given them.

This idea of using one’s own initiative was more startling then than it is now. Today, students are 'trained' to think for themselves, be creative, develop their own opinions, push forward their own independent research, using question / problem-based learning as a paradigm for their education. 'Education' in the first century wasn't like that at all. The idea was that "every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher" (Lk. 6:40). The idea was that a person born into a certain social situation was trained to take their place in society, given that 'station and place' into which they had been born. Initiative in that sense was not encouraged; it was all about training up a person to correctly fulfil societies' expectation of them. The idea of being personally taught by the invisible Master / teacher Jesus, becoming like Him rather than like the person whom society expected, being given talents by Him which we are to trade and multiply at our initiative (Mt. 25:15-28)... this was all totally counter-cultural stuff. What was so vital in the Mediterranean world was that a person achieved conformity to accepted values. Cicero advised that in any good presentation of a legal case or encomium, emotions and passions shouldn't be referred to. Individualism was seen as a threat to tradition and the collective society. The huge New Testament emphasis on becoming disciples, learners, of an invisible Lord, Master and teacher

located in Heaven, serving Him alone, worried about *His* standards, perceptions and judgment of us- that was and is so totally opposite to the expectations of society. People were educated to be embedded in society, rather than to come out of their world and live in the new world in which Christ was the light, and all things were made new in a new creation, a new set of values.

Several times Paul alludes to the parable of the talents; in Rom. 12:6 he suggests that this parable has an application to each having a different gift within the ecclesia; whilst in 1 Cor. 12:11 and Eph. 4:7 he implies that he saw the talents as representing miraculous Holy Spirit gifts. This shows how Paul applied the basic principles of Christ's teaching to local situations, even though it may seem strictly to be slightly out of context. He does the same with Christ's commands concerning personal offences in Mt. 18; he applies them, strictly out of context, to dealing with doctrinal problems at Corinth. But this, presumably, is how we are to read the Gospels; understanding the basic principles, and applying them in different situations in practice.

25:16 *Immediately he that received*- Continuing Matthew's common theme of immediacy of response. We have freely received [s.w.], and are to freely give (10:8). The context is of giving the things of the Gospel to others. This is the incredible wealth of silver we have been entrusted with. We "receive" [s.w.] the seed / word of the Gospel (13:31,33), just as in the previous parable the virgins receive [s.w. "took"] their lamps (25:1) when we "received the knowledge of the Truth" (Heb. 10:26). The emphasis upon their 'receiving' the talents (:16,18,20,22,24) shows that the talents are not natural abilities, but what is given by the Lord. And straight after this teaching, the Lord uses the same word to urge His followers to take or [s.w.] 'receive' the bread and wine, the symbols of His life given to us (26:26,27). But that is ongoing- we receive [s.w.] "of His fullness" (Jn. 1:16), all that He is, He has divided amongst us His servants; different aspects of His personality and work in this world. This is achieved practically through the medium of the word and the Spirit- for again He uses the word about us 'receiving' the Father's words (Jn. 17:8) and receiving the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20:22). There are specific things we are called to do- Paul surely alludes here when he speaks of how what he "received of the Lord Jesus" was the ministry of testifying to the good news of His grace (Acts 20:24).

The five talents went- This may seem a superfluous word, until we perceive a connection with the great preaching commission, to *go* into all the world with the Gospel.

And traded- The same word is translated "work" in the parable of the sons working in the vineyard (21:28). Whilst salvation is on the basis of grace

and not works (Rom. 4:4,5), there is all the same a fundamental call to "work" in response to that grace. If we do not, then we have to remember that "faith without works is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). And this is a severe temptation. To believe, to assent to Christian and Biblical ideas, but not to respond further, thinking that the mere possession of the ideas is enough. This was the one talent man; his faith remained "alone". The "work" was to be done within the vineyard. The ecclesia of Christ, the body of Christ, is merely a structure enabling our response in practice. The "work" was to harvest the fruit of the vine- to work with others bringing them in to the final harvest of salvation. In another metaphor, we ourselves are to bring forth fruit on the vine; but the metaphor of harvesting used in 21:28 and in other parables of the vineyard surely speaks of harvesting others for the Kingdom. The same word has just been used by the Lord in saying that the Son of Man has left his house and given to each man in the household his "work" (Mk. 13:34). We each have a specific work or trading to do, tailored personally to what the Lord has given us. Sadly, the structure of church life has often become so developed and defined that the average church member assumes that the work is being done by the specialists. "Get professional help" is the comment made on so many cases of personal need encountered; "Read the book... come to the seminars... to the meetings" can all be a passing up of our personal responsibility to work. The judgment seat is largely about presenting to the Lord our work in this life. And yet John uses the same word in recording the Lord's comment that the deeds ['trading', s.w.] of the faithful are even now "made manifest that they are wrought in God" if we come to the light of the cross which is the basis of all self-examination and self-understanding (Jn 3:21).

We can indeed prove / examine our own work [s.w.] even in this life (Gal. 6:4). People are never better than when they perceive clearly their calling and the work they are intended to do- and give their lives to doing it. Barnabas and Saul were 'called' just as the servants here were 'called' (:14) to do the 'work' [s.w. 'trading'] of spreading the Gospel (Acts 13:2), and experienced the Spirit confirming them in the "work" [s.w.] they were 'fulfilling' (Acts 14:26). The idea of 'fulfilling' a work given suggests that they were fulfilling God's intention for them. And again we note that the work was related to bringing others to Christ. Just as the servants 'went' to 'trade', so Paul talks of 'going' to "the work" [s.w. 'trade'], again in the context of missionary work (Acts 15:38). God will render to every man according to his "works" (s.w. Rom. 2:6). Our trading is the basis upon which we will be judged. The gift has been given by pure grace, as it was to the servants; but we have to respond to that grace, lest we have believed and accepted in vain. It is the works *of the law* [of Moses] which will not justify (Rom. 3:20); rather our works are to be those in response to the Lord's great gifts to us. 1 Cor. 3:13-15 uses this same word for 'working / trading' and again applies it to our work in building others up- and the day of judgment will declare the quality of that work. The

Corinthians were therefore Paul's "work in the Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1), even though he baptized virtually none of them, his efforts for them were his attempt to trade / work with the talents given him. God clearly has intended works / trading for each of us, "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And the NT usage of the idea of works / trading is nearly always in the context of preaching or caring for others. Paul may well have himself in mind when he promises the Philippians that "He who began a good work in you [Paul's initial preaching at Philippi] will work at finishing it right up to the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6 cp. 22). The key is to be open to God's leading. Thus Paul urged Timothy to purge himself from bad company so that he might be prepared or ready "unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21), and to devote himself to the Scriptures that he might be "equipped unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17). These works are surely those "Good works [s.w.] which God has before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And we should be "ready to every good work... thoughtful to be ready for good works" (Tit. 3:1,8), thoughtfully open to God's leading in response to our prayer to be shown what exactly is the work / trading intended for us. A functional church will be a place where the members are all devoted to this principle personally, and thus will "consider one another to provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24). And God will confirm our openness and willingness; He will "frame you in every good work to do His will" (Heb. 13:21 Gk.).

We cannot be passive on receiving the opportunity to serve God. We will urgently seek to do something with what we have been enabled to do for the Lord: “The servant who got five bags *went quickly* to invest the money and earned five more bags” (Mt. 25:16 NCV). The law of the peace offerings was designed so as to encourage the person who decided to make such a freewill offering to execute immediately- they were to eat it the same day they offered it, and the sacrifice would be totally unacceptable if it was killed but left for some days (Lev. 19:5-7). If we have an impulse to respond to the Lord, we should respond to it immediately. This isn’t mere impetuosity. It’s a spirit of always having an immediacy of response, which empowers us to overcome the procrastination which holds us back so much.

With them- The idea surely is that we are to trade / work with what the Lord gives us to do, with those same things; rather than decide that our natural talents, which were not given at conversion but rather are an outcome of our own environment and experience, are to be developed just as everyone in the world does- and then claimed as work for the Lord.

And made another five talents- “Made” translates *poieo*, a very common word; but it has just been used by the Lord, again in talking about His servants, in saying that the faithful servant will be found ‘doing’ care to

his brethren (24:46). And the word is twice used later in this chapter about 'doing' good unto the least of Christ's brethren, and this being the basis for our judgment (:40,45). Again we see that our work / trading involves fruitfully sharing the spiritual riches we have received with others. It's worth noting that this teaching is followed by the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet; and all the records of it use the same Greek words to describe it. She "did it" (*poieo*, 26:12,13), she "worked" (s.w. "traded") a good work ['trading'] on the Lord (26:10). It's as if her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth for the Lord was in fact smart trading in the spiritual sense. The story line implies that we can add to the total wealth of the Lord Jesus. Yet the extension of His glory, the progress of His work, depends upon us, and we are left to our own initiative in this. This is the meaning of the element of 'absence' of the Lord, and the immediacy of His leaving the servants with such huge amounts of silver without instructing them specifically how to use them.

25:17 *In like manner he also that received the two gained other two*- The word is used regarding 'gaining' others for the Kingdom: "You have gained your brother" (18:15), Paul was sensitive to his presentation of the Gospel "that I might gain the more" (1 Cor. 9:19,20,21,22); unbelieving husbands are "gained" by the example of the believing wife (1 Pet. 3:1). Clearly enough, the trading and gain of talents refers to what we do for others on the basis of what the Lord Jesus has personally given us. Not having oil to give light to others in the house [the ecclesia] and to the world is made parallel with not gaining more talents, which matches not ministering to the least [the word often refers to the spiritually least] of Christ's brethren. This shows the primacy of preaching & pastoral work / effort for others, especially in the last days. Oil burning is giving light to others. Going to sleep / not tending the lamps in the last generation is therefore lacking in love to the household, not keeping ourselves awake to give light to others. Lack of care for others in the last days results in lamps going out and our generation slumbering. Does this imply that in the last days there will not be the care for the least of Christ's needy brethren which there should be? The last generation will be slumbering when shouldn't be, i.e. not giving light to the world and brotherhood as they should. And could it be that the spiritually "least" whom they despise are the new converts made in the last days tribulation, whom they somehow disregard?

25:18 *But he that received the one went away and dug in the earth and hid his lord's money*- The tragedy is that the Gospel is hid from the majority anyway (s.w. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26). It is treasure hid in a field which must be found (13:44). And it is hid now by one to whom it was revealed in order to share with others, put back in the earth from which the Lord Jesus had extracted it. By hiding it, the man effectively was placing himself in the same position as the unbelieving world. The allusion is clearly to Achan, hiding God's talents in the earth,

for himself. In this connection we perhaps have an insight into the man's mentality. Can we infer that the man reasoned that the Lord might in fact never return, and therefore, his Lord's talents would become his? His excuses about the Lord being unreasonably demanding and "therefore" he did nothing with the talent all seem rather illogical, as if he was just saying it for the sake of mumbling at least something. His real motivation, surely, was to keep the talent for himself- on the basis that his Lord would not return. And this is the context of the parable. The fact we know that Christ will return, even if we do not know when exactly, will guard us against such an assumption- that we can take what is His as ours.

The fact it was not his ("his Lord's money") meant that he had no right to simply not use it. The fact we have been given so much by the Lord is undeniable; and we are to use it for Him and not hide it. Because it's not ours to do that with.

25:19 *Now after a long time- Chronos*, "time", can as a word imply delay or an interval. If time has 'length', as it does here, this can only be in the expectation of human beings. It would be fair to interpret this phrase, even simply on the basis of the original Greek, as meaning 'after a long delay'. And this would admirably fit the context- for the parables of Matthew 25 are a commentary upon the closing warning of the Olivet prophecy, that there is indeed a delay to the Lord's coming (24:48; 25:5). Our sufferings now are only for a moment compared to the glorious eternity of the Kingdom (Ps. 37:10; 2 Cor. 4:17), and yet the language of the Bible also expresses God's appreciation that from our perspective, our time of probation is "a long time" (25:19). See on 20:16.

The lord of those servants came and made a reckoning with them- The Lord's coming was surely not in AD70 because He did not reckon up with all His servants then; there was no resurrection of the faithful in order to reckon with them. The Greek text here is *sunairo logos*- He reckons the *logos* with them, He considers the thought behind their actions. It wasn't so much a reckoning on a simply utilitarian, mercenary level. Rather was it an examination of their inner *logos* and motivation, as demonstrated by the discussion with the one talent man concerning his inner thoughts about his Lord. *Sunairo* is only used elsewhere in 18:23,24 where the Lord's reckoning with His servants begins now in this life. And they had miserably failed in money management. Yet He still wanted relationship with them, and frankly forgave them, whilst assuming they would on that basis forgive any of their own far smaller debtors. But even that didn't work out. Putting the Lord's parables together, so many of them are about servants; and the servants often behave in an incredibly bad way to Him. And we are those servants.

25:20 *And he that received the five talents came*- This is *proserchomai,* and the word used for the Lord's coming is *erchomai* (:19). He comes to us and the faithful come to Him. As

outlined earlier, this will have a literal element to it. When we know for sure that the Lord has come, we will have the choice as to whether to go to Him immediately or delay. Those who go immediately will be confirmed in that by being snatched away to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17). One of the great themes of Matthew's gospel is that various men and women 'came to Jesus' at different times and in a variety of situations. The Lord uses the same term to describe how at the last day, people will once again 'come unto' Him (Mt. 25:20-24). The same Jesus whom they 'came before' in His ministry is the one to whom they and we shall again come at the last day- to receive a like gracious acceptance. He will judge and reason the same way He did during His mortality. Likewise we know what kind of judge Christ is, and so the meeting of Him in final judgment need not be for us something so terribly unknown and uncertain. We know that He is the judge who 'justifies' sinners- the Greek word means not so much 'making righteous', but 'acquitting, declaring righteous' in a legal sense. It's unthinkable that a human judge treats the guilty as if they are righteous and innocent, just because they are "in" Christ. It's also unheard of that a judge also is the counsel for the defence! But this is the kind of judge we have, day by day- to those who believe. Will He be so different in the last day?

And brought another five talents, saying: Lord- He offered / presented the talents to his Lord. Only in the day of judgment will we achieve final self-knowledge and be able to perceive what we have done and achieved with what He has given us. Our trading / work is clearly with the Lord's people. The presentation of the wealth gained therefore refers to what we have done for others. Paul spoke of how he would 'present' his converts to Christ at the last day; hence his concern about their development, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

You gave me five talents. Look, I have gained another five talents- This is the word used for the 'delivering' to believers of the body of doctrine comprising the Gospel message (1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 3). Again we see that the talents refer to what is specifically given to us by Christ at the time of our calling by the Gospel, and not to any latent natural ability within us.

25:21 *His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant*- The term used in the previous parable (24:45). There, the "faithful servant" was faithful in that he provided food for the other servants within the household, and didn't beat the fellow-servants. Here, the faithful servant trades his Lord's wealth for a profit. The metaphors refer to the same essential activity- sharing the wealth we have in Christ for the benefit of our brethren. To cut them off, waste their energy and attention with empty arguments and pedantic concerns, ignore them… is to not trade the talents, to be unfaithful.

You have been faithful over a few things- The equivalent parable in Lk. 19:17 says "in a very little" (*elachistos*). This very same word is found later in Matthew 25, when we read that the final judgment will be based around how we have treated "the least" of the Lord's brethren (25:40,45). The talents we have been given relate to them- how we have used them, what we have done for them, how we have served them with the riches given us by the Lord. There is obviously a connection between the manner in which we rule over the "few things", and how we shall be given "many things" to rule over in the Kingdom age. Clearly what we are doing now is in essence what we shall eternally be doing, but on a greater level. If our lives are centred merely around ourselves and doing what we want, developing ourselves, rather than developing the Lord's work and doing *His* work, then we will be out of step with the life eternal. We are to start living that now. And then we shall live it eternally.

So I will set you over- The preceding parable says that we have already been made ruler in the Lord's household in order to feed the members (24:45 s.w.). Our whole church experience, our relations with others and efforts for them, is to prepare us for being made ruler over all the Lord's goods (24:47). We cannot of course accurately imagine what new dimensions await us, but all we can say is that we are in training for them, and that training involves the care of others within the household now. To separate ourselves from that household, or cast others out of it, is to deny both ourselves and others the environment required for us to prepared for eternity.

Many things- The Lord gave a related teaching in Lk. 16:10-12: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?". What is given to us now is to test our faithfulness. If we don't perceive what we have been given, and so many believers tell me they are unsure about this, *then you need to ask the Lord to show you*. Urgently. And give your life to developing those things. The Luke 16 passage appears to say that in this life, we are stewards of the Lord's wealth; but if we manage that well, then we will be rewarded with wealth which is actually and personally our own. For eternity. That 'wealth' will be of the same nature as that given to us by the Lord initially. Here we have a rare insight into the nature of our eternity. "Many things" is equivalent to "all His goods" (24:47; Lk. 12:44). There is nothing that is the Lord's which will not be shared with us and in some sense give to us to exercise our initiative over.

Enter into- This is *eis-erchomai*, and is the Lord's confirmation of how the servant responded to the call to come to Him by 'coming' to Him, *pros-*

erchomai (:20). Once again we meet the teaching that our initial response at the Lord's return, our willing desire to go to Him, will be confirmed by Him bringing us closer to Him. The same word has just been used about the wise virgins 'going in' to the wedding (25:10) having initially responded to the call without delay. The same word is used of Noah entering the ark (24:38), and these parables in chapter 25 appear to be an expansion upon that.

The joy of your Lord- The joy of the Lord Jesus as revealed in His own teaching is specifically His joy at the repentance of others. He speaks of Himself as the shepherd rejoicing over the lost sheep (Mt. 18:13; Lk. 15:5) and the repentance of any sinner (Lk. 15:7), at the return of the prodigal (Lk. 15:32), joyful that the disciples believed in Him (Jn. 11:15), joyful at finding the believers in the world (Mt. 13:44). The reasons for the Lord's joy were all related to the salvation and spiritual blessing *of others*. He went on to say soon afterwards that His joy was to become the joy of the disciples even in this life (Jn. 15:11; 17:13). This will ultimately happen at the point of entry into the Kingdom at the day of judgment, but the essence of it is to begin now. And it can indeed begin now, if the Lord's joy at others' repentance, growth and salvation becomes *our* joy, and our joy is no longer in ourselves and material things. There is also here a Joseph allusion- "They were merry with him" (Gen. 43:34). He would fain have them enter into the joy of their Lord.

25:22 *And also he that had received the two talents came and said: Lord, you gave me two talents. Look, I have gained another two talents*- Paul uses the same word for "received" in 1 Cor. 4:7: "For who makes you to differ? And what have you that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?". All that we have spiritually including the knowledge of the Lord Jesus in truth, is a gift we received. And yet we can easily act as if we did not receive it, suggesting instead that we found the Lord ourselves by our own searching. Many people have a spiritual search all their lives and never find much if anything. What we have got is a gift we received, and we must ever be humbled by that.

25:23 *His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a few things*- The "Truth" we have now (and it is that) is "a very little... a few things". We mustn't see it as an end in itself. Yet because of our humanity, our limited vision, the way we are locked up in our petty paradigms, we tend to think that the Kingdom will be rather similar to our present experience of "the Truth". Yet the Lord emphasizes, at least twice, that what we have now is pathetically limited compared to the infinitely greater spiritual vision of the Kingdom. We (personally) will then be made ruler over *all* that Christ has (Mt. 24:47; the "many things" of Mt. 25:23); and in him are hid *all* the riches of spiritual wisdom (Col. 2:3).

So I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord!- The figure of judgment would suggest a grim faced judge, with all the dignity and soberness of the courtroom, whatever the verdict is. But there are elements of unreality in the pictures of judgment which are put before us in the parables. This judge is emotionally involved in each case (unheard of in a human court); and He is also the advocate and the witness who finds nothing bad to say; and He exalts: "Well done... enter into the joy of your Lord". The picture is of the happy judge, breaking down in joy at the verdict, inviting the hesitant believer to share his joy in their victory. The picture seems so imaginable; "you, enter into the joy of thy Lord" suggests a reticence, an unbelief, at the outcome. Compare this with the one hour labourers receiving a day's pay (Mt. 20:9), and the faithful almost remonstrating with their Lord that they have not done the things He reminds them of (Mt. 25:38-40). But we will overcome our reticence; we *will* enter our Lord's joy; for we shall stand before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24). "Enter into the joy of your Lord!" sounds like the Lord may have to encourage us to get over our weeping, and enter into the sheer joy which He has, that we've finally made it. "*Come…!!* You blessed of my Father! Enter the Kingdom…!" sounds like something similar. Now all these things are highly emotional. Yet we will have God's nature. He therefore has the same kind of emotional capabilities as we will have. And, He exercises them right now.

25:24 *And also he that had received the one talent came and said-* The judgment of the righteous comes before that of the rejected. The faithful respond first to the news that 'He's back', and their willingness to go and be with Him is effectively their judgment. Those who delay are the unworthy and are therefore judged slightly later.

Lord- The man considers himself one of the Lord's servants, within the household. He clearly felt he had been given too little to do anything much with; but actually the talent was worth around 1 million $, or 20 years' wages. He didn't appreciate the greatness of what he had been given.

I knew you- In reality, he didn't know his Lord. For those who 'know the Lord' will be saved, and it is the unbelieving world who do not know Him (s.w. Jn. 17:3,25). Because that isn't at all how the Lord is (hard, unreasonable, etc.). But the Lord doesn't correct the false understanding, thereby justifying Himself. Rather does He [as so often] reason with the man upon the basis of the man's professed belief system. We see this so often in the Lord's teaching style, and in the way the Gospels use the language of demons. Error is not baldly exposed and corrected, rather are those who believe it worked with according to their understandings, and gently brought to a realization that those views are unhelpful and not the correct reality. The focus, therefore, was upon people, upon the persons holding the ideas, rather than the error of the ideas in themselves. And

this has much to teach us; for so many Protestant groups have become obsessed with exposing intellectual error for its own sake; whereas our focus must be upon the individuals who hold those misbeliefs.

Are a hard man- The problem was the man's wrong attitude and laziness to do anything. The prodigal son was given much of his Father's wealth, and he wasted it rather than trading it. But he recognized the Father's grace and was prepared to work just as a servant. And this attitude was his salvation. So this man's rejection wasn't simply because he had failed to do any trading.

Another take on this is that there is a sense in which the Lord is indeed a "hard man", a demanding Lord, His expectations were (and are) high. And yet His parables reveal an immense sympathy and empathy with our weakness. In a normal human situation, it would be difficult to build a relationship with someone who had such apparently contradictory trends in His character. Perhaps we have the same problem in our struggle to know the Lord. He never denied that He came over in some ways as "a hard man" with high expectations; all He said was that seeing this was the case, we ought to act accordingly (Mt. 25:24). And yet He is also a man of grace and understanding far beyond anything reached by anyone else. He is truly the Jesus who understands human weakness. And note that He is described even now as "the man Christ Jesus", able to feel the pulse of our humanity. This, in passing, opens a window into what Divine nature will be like: we will be able to completely feel the human experience, to the extent of still bearing the title 'men' even in immortality.

Reaping where you did not sow- The moment of conversion is the beginning of the gathering to judgment (Lk. 11:23; Jn. 4:36). The one talent man didn't appreciate this; he objected to the Lord reaping and gathering him (Mt. 25:24). But whatever human objections, the responsible from all nations *will be gathered* to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The servants are called to receive their talents, and then called again to account (Lk. 19;13,15); there is something in common between the calling to know the Gospel, and the calling to judgment. If reaping refers to judgment [which it clearly does in the Lord's teaching], then the man could hardly claim to have known the Lord on the basis of how He reaps. Because the man hadn't experienced the Lord's reaping. The man says he 'knows' [*ginosko*] the Lord is like this; the Lord answers that if indeed the man has 'known' [*eido*- which more means to see / experience] that He is like this, then he should have acted accordingly. The suggestion may be that even if a person's understanding of the Lord Jesus is slightly wrong, the important thing is to live within and according to that understanding, even if it involves breaking some Divine principles [lending for interest]. If the desire to respond to the Lord's gift was there, the desire to progress

His work, then although such response was not ideal and not as good as that achieved by the other two servants, then the Lord would accept it. The language of sowing, reaping and gathering is all described using the same Greek words in the Lord's comment that the birds don't do these three things, and yet God still feeds them (Mt. 6:26). Perhaps the man was making a garbled, incoherent attempt to say that he had understood those words of the Lord to mean that He was somehow going to be an unreasonable judge with unreal expectations, therefore he had done nothing, although he had not spent the talent [unlike the prodigal son- who desperately wanted to be with the Father]. We may be intended to understand his reasoning as being 'You created birds who don't sow, reap nor gather into barns, they just expect food. And God thinks that's good. So, He is like what He creates'. And perhaps the man also had in view Jn. 4:38: "I sent you to reap that whereon you bestowed no labour. Other men laboured…". The harvest of people was reaped by those who hadn't fully worked for it, and the man desperately tries to turn that around to justify his own lack of action. Such desperate twisting of Bible verses can be seen at every hand today, as people wriggle by all means to justify their inaction and selfishness.

And gathering where you did not scatter seed- The Lord is clearly the sower of seed, the seed of the word of the Kingdom (13:3). But the man is complaining that the Lord 'reaps' or calls to judgment those who had not received that seed. That is not the case- for knowledge of the Gospel is what makes responsible to judgment. The Lord could have corrected him by reminding him of the sower parable. But He doesn't. He reasons with the man according to the belief system which he claims to have, assuming for a moment that it is in fact true. His whole style ought to be programmatic for us in our frequent encounters with those who misuse Scripture and the Lord's words. The Lord does *not* expect a harvest from ground He has not sown; and in any case, the man had heard the word, received the talent. He was ground which had been sown, and the Lord could therefore expect a harvest from him. Like many people today, he started to raise philosophical questions about the fate of those who have not heard, and justified his own inaction [as one who definitely *had* heard and been called] on the basis of his doubts as to the Lord's justice in dealing with those who had *not* been called. Truly these ancient teachings speak to the heart of postmodern man today.

"Gathering" was highly relevant to the man, for the language of 'gathering' is often used about the gathering of God's servants to judgment (3:12; 13:30; 25:32). The man was implying that his 'gathering' to judgment was unreasonable because the Lord had not sown in his land, had not strawed where he has. He felt he was being gathered to give an account when the Lord had given him nothing to account for. And yet the obvious fact was, the elephant in the room, that the Lord had given him a talent, 20 years' wages, $1 million. And yet the man

reasoned as if he had not been given anything to account for. He totally refused to perceive the immense value of what he had been given. And this is so true for us- we for whom Christ died, the blood of God's Son shed, we who have been called to eternity, who by status are "saved" and showered with all spiritual blessings… can complain that we have not been given anything. Because in our minds we have buried it away, and reason as if we never received it. Here again, the Lord's ancient words pierce to the core of modern Christian self-perception.

The Greek *diaskorpizo* can mean 'to scatter' and can therefore be used about sowing; but it also has the specific meaning 'to winnow'. In this case, the picture would be of a man who has not winnowed and yet expects to come and gather up wheat. Again, the man may be attempting to twist the Lord's words about 'gathering wheat into His barn' (13:30, repeating John's words of 3:12). His idea would be 'You expect the wheat to be waiting for You without even winnowing it'. But of course the point was that winnowing represented judgment, and this was exactly what the Lord had come to do. But in His grace, the Lord doesn't make that obvious point, but runs with the man's words and reasoning and shows him that however wrong his imaginations were about the Lord, he should have acted according to them if he truly loved his Lord. But he hadn't done so; because he was selfish and lazy.

25:25- see on Mt. 25:14.
And I was afraid- Fear of the judgment of others is a source of false guilt. It is this which militates against the true and free life of which the Lord speaks so enthusiastically. We fear showing ourselves for who we really are, because we fear others' judgments. This fear makes us uncreative, not bearing the unique spiritual fruits which the Lord so eagerly seeks from us and in us. The Lord said this plainly, when He characterized the man who did nothing with his talents as lamely but truthfully saying: "I was afraid" (Mt. 25:25). Think about this: What or whom was he afraid of? His fear was not so much of his Lord's judgment, but rather perhaps of the judgments of others, that he might do something wrong, wrongly invest, look stupid, mess it all up... And thus John writes that it is fear that leads to torment of soul now and final condemnation. The Lord's words in the parable are almost exactly those of Adam. The rejected one talent man says 'I was afraid, and so I hid *my talent*'. Adam said: 'I was afraid, and I hid *myself*'. The talent God gave that man was therefore himself, his real self. To not use our talent, to not blossom from the experience of God's love and grace, is to not use ourselves, is to not be ourselves, the *real* self as God intended.

And went away and hid your talent in the earth- Just as Achan did, hoping that what was not his would somehow become his in time. In line with our earlier suggestions that the man was alluding to the Lord's words, one wonders if here he has in mind the Lord's teaching about the Kingdom as

treasure hid in a field [i.e. in the ground] which must be found (13:44). Of course, it's terribly out of context. But that's the way so many people use the Lord's words, as if sharing the same lexical items with Him somehow adds legitimacy to their doing just precisely what *they* want to do- rather than serving Him. The Lord Jesus was the man of 13:44 who sold all that He had to buy / redeem the field in which the treasure was buried. By returning the treasure into the earth, the man was effectively undoing the work of the Lord on the cross; for the field is the world (13:38), and the price of the field's redemption was the Lord's blood. But by laziness and a vague hope that the wealth would by default become his own, the Lord's work on the cross was undone for this man. The connection with 13:44 is surely purposeful.

Here, have what is yours- So many of the parables build up to a final climax which is the essence of the point the Lord was trying to get across; and this 'end stress' is also seen in the talents parable. The warning is not to be like the man who didn't have the vision to do anything with his talent, but buried it and returned it unused to the Lord. This perhaps is our greatest temptation in our postmodern age of passivity, of staring at computer screens and clicking a mouse. "Lo, there You have what is Yours" suggests an air of confidence in this man; he really didn't get it, that he was asked to trade what he'd been given. The fact he had retained it pristine appears to have been his reason for thinking that he ought to be accepted, or at least, didn't ought to be condemned. The story line penetrates deep into the mentality of many small time Protestant sects, according to which the ultimate test of loyalty to the Lord is whether we have retained our understanding of whatever curious or specific interpretations were entrusted to us via the charismatic founder of the sect. This man thought that that was all there was to it. He didn't spend it on himself, he wasn't like the prodigal son. But too late he was to learn that sins of omission are the ground for condemnation. To do nothing with God's Truth is described by the Lord as 'wickedness'. The grammar emphasizes personal possession: *You* have what *belongs to You*. As if to say 'I didn't steal it! It's yours, and it remains yours'. But the whole point was that the Lord had given the talents to the servants and gone away- they had to trade in their own name, as if they were theirs. Thus the other two servants speak somewhat differently, of the talents which had been "delivered" to them. We're not simply receptacles of intellectual truths which are to be preserved for the sake of it until the end of our days. That would be of itself pointless, a kind of mind game played between God and man for no ultimate purpose. We are given God's Truth, the riches of Christ, in order to use it for others; the whole talk of 'preserving the Truth in its purity' is dangerously close to inculcating the mentality of the one talent man- the mentality that led to his condemnation. See on :29 *Taken away*.

Perhaps we have never seriously thought of being generous to someone else [even if it's a few pennies from our poverty]; of actively telling an acquaintance about the Gospel; of doing acts of kindness for someone 'out of the blue', thinking up something nice for them which will make them feel 'Wow!'; doing mission work; reconciliation with our enemies; seeing beyond our immediate emotions of hurt, pleasure, anger, passion. When we step out in faith and do these things, we start living a totally new kind of life. We find God setting us up with situations, working with and through us- and we feel it. We will see beyond the steely silence of the skies to know the reality of Angelic existence. One of my favourite Bible stories is that of Elisha and his frightened servant. Elisha asks God to open the man's eyes so that he might see the Angelic armies surrounding them; Elisha [and I so love this] didn't ask for his own eyes to be opened to see them; he was so certain they were there.

25:26 *But his lord answered and said to him: You wicked and slothful servant*- The Lord's only other reference to a wicked servant is in the parable of the wicked servant who runs up a huge debt, is forgiven, and then refuses to forgive a far smaller debt, putting the debtor in prison (18:32). The two men are clearly intended to be compared. The one of 18:32 was dishonest with his Lord's money [for how else did he amass such a huge debt to his Lord? Was it not that he was found out for dishonesty?]; he was materialistic in the extreme; and he was incredibly ungrateful and unforgiving. He committed many sins. The "wicked servant" of 25:26 does nothing wrong, is not overtly materialistic; but his sin of omission, his laziness [AV "slothful"], meant that in reality he had done just the same as the man who committed so much wrong.

The Lord's parable was clearly alluding to a contemporary Jewish rabbinic parable later recorded in the Zohar Chadash, folio 47: "A certain king gave a deposit to three of his servants: the first kept it; the second lost it; the third spoiled one part of it, and gave the rest to another to keep. After some time, the king came and demanded the deposit. Him who had preserved it, the king praised, and made him governor of his house. Him who had lost it, he delivered to utter destruction, so that both his name and his possessions were blotted out. To the third, who had spoiled a part and given the rest to another to keep, the king said, Keep him, and let him not go out of my house, till we see what the other shall do to whom he has entrusted a part: if he shall make a proper use of it, this man shall be restored to liberty; if not, he also shall be punished". The point of contrast is that the Lord is far more demanding. The Jewish story praised the man who simply preserved the deposit. The Lord Jesus condemned the same man for doing nothing positive with it. The third man in the Jewish parable was given the possibility of repentance. But the third man in the Lord's parable was condemned with no possibility of changing the verdict- for this life is our sole time of responsibility. The Lord is purposefully alluding to this parable, and deconstructing it. Passivity,

‘holding on to the faith’ in a passive sense, much glorified by both Judaism and Protestant Christianity, is what may be glorified in human religion; but it’s exactly this attitude which will be the ground of condemnation.

You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter seed- See on :24 *I knew you*. There are different words used. Here, *eido* means more ‘to see’. The Lord’s response could actually be translated as a question: ‘You [really?] saw Me reap where I did not sow…?’. The process of reaping definitely refers to the last judgment, and so the man had no basis upon which to make this claim, because he had never actually ‘seen’ the Lord act like that. But I prefer to understand the Lord as taking the man’s ideas and working with them, without specifically correcting them- and saying that even if the man’s understanding of Him was correct, then He expected him to act appropriately to that understanding. Instead of doing nothing.

25:27 *You should*- Explaining how the man could have entered the Kingdom is surely the basis for the gnashing of teeth. To have it explained like that… is harder than any hell fire of classical imagination. He ought to have given the talent to the exchangers. Either he should’ve given it to the Gentiles, or he should have at least done something, in lending it to his Jewish brethren- even against the Law. “Oughtest”, *dia,* means you must have, you had to- very possession of the talent meant we have to, we must, share it with others in some way- we are all preachers. I have often pondered what we are to learn in our generation from the strict statement that males without the ability to procreate were barred from the Lord’s congregation during the Old Covenant (Dt. 23:1). Perhaps the point is that all those who are the Lord’s people must recognize their ability to procreate for Him, in the bringing forth of yet others in their Lord’s image.

The man being told how he could have entered the Kingdom is after the pattern of rejected Adam and Eve having the way to the tree of life clearly shown to them after their rejection (Gen. 3:23,24). Again, notice how the judgment is for the education of those judged and those who witness it. He will shew them how they should have given their talent, the basic Gospel, to others, and therefore gained some interest. This has to be connected with the well known prohibition on lending money to fellow Israelites for usury; usury could only be received from Gentiles (Dt. 23:20). Surely the Lord is implying that *at the least* this person could have shared the Gospel with others, especially (in a Jewish context) the Gentile world. This would have at least brought some usury for the Lord. This would suggest that issues such as apathy in preaching, especially the unwillingness of the Jewish believers to share their hope with the Gentiles, will be raised by the Lord during the judgment process. Of

course, the Lord hadn't told the servant (in the story) to lend the money to Gentiles; he was expected to use his initiative. The overall picture of the story is that at least the man should have done *something!* Alternatively, it could be that we are intended to understand that the Lord would even have accepted him if he lent money on usury, something which the Law condemned; if he'd have done *something*, even if it involved breaking some aspects of God's will... Instead, his attitude was that he had been given the talent of the Gospel, and he saw his duty as to just keep hold on it. He was angry that the Lord should even suggest he ought to have done anything else! We really must watch for this attitude in ourselves. He justifies himself by saying that he has "kept" the money (Lk. 19:20), using the word elsewhere used about the need to *keep* or hold on to the doctrines of the One Faith (1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; Rev. 6:9). He had done this, he had held on, he hadn't left the faith. And he thought this was enough to bring him to the Kingdom. Sadly, many understandings of spirituality has almost glorified this very attitude. Any who show initiative have been seen as mavericks, as likely to go wrong. The emphasis has been on holding on to basic doctrinal teaching, marking your Bible with it, attending weekly meetings about it (even if you snooze through them), regularly attending... And, son, you won't go far wrong. The Lord, in designing this parable as he did, had exactly this sort of complacency in mind. In view of the man's beliefs about the Lord, he still should've acted accordingly.

Have deposited my money with the bankers- The Lord probably means that the man should have done at least something, putting the money into "the bank" (Lk.), doing something effortless [in line with his lazy character], but at least doing something. And yet just possibly the Lord may also have in view the money exchangers whom He so despised and whose tables He overthrew in 21:12. It's as if the Lord is saying that He was willing to make major concessions to the man- if he had done at least something, even if that 'something' was far less than ideal. A Rabbinic teaching claims that bankers should never be trusted and therefore "Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth" (*b. B. Mes'ia* 42A, quoted in R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 954). The Lord is consciously deconstructing Rabbinic views. If we had more access to such contemporary texts, we would likely understand many of the more enigmatic and difficult passages of Scripture- probably they are alluding to and deconstructing contemporary writings.

So that on my return I would have collected my own money with interest- The Lord will *receive or* collect back His own. Strong defines this as "to carry off, away from harm" (the same word is used in Heb. 11:19 about Abraham *receiving* Isaac from the dead). There is the suggestion that the Truth which the Lord has given us is valuable to Him, and He

fears our losing it; those who lose the faith lose the personal possession of the Lord Jesus. But at the judgment, when we hand it back to the Lord, He (not to say, we) will have that deep knowledge that now we can't fail Him any more, we no longer have the possibility of causing harm and loss to the treasured wealth which has been entrusted to us. We need to remember, however, that there was no banking system as we have today. Lending money to exchangers was a highly risky business and often resulted in the loss of money; money was safer stored in the earth, as the man did. So the Lord's point was that he should have taken a risk; indeed, all such trading requires risk taking which may leave us looking foolish. But the Lord may be implying that if he had taken that risk for the right reasons, all ultimately would have worked out well.

Lk. 19:23 says at this point that the Lord will "require" of us our use of wealth (Lk. 19:23). The man who did nothing with his pound should have at least lent it out on usury, the Lord said- even though this was illegal according to Moses. He should have done at least *something* with his money, even if it involved taking a lower level of service than the Lord ideally expects. The Greek means to exact regularly, in an ongoing sense (s.w. Lk. 3:13); Strong defines it as meaning "to perform repeatedly... not a single act". When the Lord examines our achievements at the judgment, He will expect to keep on receiving the result of what we have achieved for Him in this life. This is the ultimate encouragement for us in our preaching and encouraging of others, as well as ourselves; what we achieve now will yield eternal, continual fruit to the Lord.

"My own money" reminds us of the fact that He is Lord *of all*. This means He is owner of absolutely everything to do with us (Acts 10:36). At the judgment, this fact will be brought home. The Lord will ask for "my money... mine own"; we will be asked what we have done with our Lord's money (Mt. 20:15; 25:27). All we have is God's; it is not our own. Therefore if we hold back in our giving and trading, we are *robbing God*. Israel thought it was absurd to put it like this: But yes, God insisted through Malachi (3:8-12), you are *robbing me* if you don't give back, or even if you don't give your heart to Him in faith. *And will a man rob God?* Will a man...? We must give God what has His image stamped on it: and we, our bodies, are made in His image (Mt. 22:21); therefore we have a duty to give ourselves to Him. We are not our own: how much less is 'our' money or time our own! Like David, we need to realize now, *in this life*, before the judgment, that all our giving is only a giving back to God of what we have been given by Him: "Of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 19:14). The danger of materialism is the assumption that we are ultimate owners of what we 'have'.

25:28 *So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents*- The faithful will have enough self-knowledge to be able to say:

'You gave me these basic doctrines and these characteristics to develop with them, and I can now present you with this...'. That part of the character and mind of Christ which was given to the unfaithful servant to develop is taken away and given to the faithful. The unfaithful receive the riches of Christ but do nothing with them; they don't let them impact their character.

The man having ten talents as his own is in sharp contrast with the way the one talent man speaks of how the talent is not his but the Lord's: "Here You have what is Yours" (:25). The Lord is making the point that the faithful will now personally own the talents they were first given, plus they will be allowed to keep for their personal, eternal possession what talents they made during the trading of this life. The progress achieved in this life will be kept eternally. Yet words like 'achievement' are almost dirty words in the vocabulary of grace which some insist on. The Lord's teaching here must be given its due weight.

25:29 *For to everyone that has shall be given, and he shall have abundance*- This repeats the Lord's earlier teaching in 13:10-12 about the giving of understanding to those who have some: "And the disciples came and said to him: Why do you speak to them in parables? And he answered and said to them: To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whoever has, to him shall be given and he shall have abundance, but whoever has not, from him shall be taken away even what he has". Clearly there is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and this will come to ultimate term in the outcomes of judgment day.

But from him that has not, even what he has shall be taken away- This is a paradox. Does the rejected man have talents, or not? He did, of course, have a talent; but as far as the Lord is concerned, we only have what we have developed. If we don't develop, we have nothing; the fact we received the talent at baptism won't save us. It's only what a man has developed from that in the service of others which counts as truly "his". This likewise is the sense of "To him that has shall be given"; all we have is what we have developed.

"Taken away" is perhaps a special reference to the Kingdom of God being "taken away" [s.w.] from Israel and given to the Gentiles (21:43). The same Greek word is used about the taking away of the rejected individuals at judgment day (22:13; 24:39). But here, it is the unused talent that is "taken away". The man was therefore to be identified with the talent- it was to be him. And yet he is most careful to speak of the talent as not his, but the Lord's: "Here you have what is yours" (:25). The Lord intended that we identify with the talent, rather than see it merely as His. See on :25 *You have what is yours.*

25:30 *And cast out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There, shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth*- Unless we are going to actually achieve something for the Lord, then we are unprofitable. But of course the same words for "unprofitable servant" are found in Lk. 17:10- after we have "done all" that we could, we are to recognize that we are still in this category of "unprofitable servant". Salvation itself is still by grace. The story of the slave who worked all day in the field and was then expected to come home and cook for his master without a word of thanks to him seems to be more realistic, lacking the element of unreality usually seen in the parables. But the Greek word "*charis*", usually translated "grace", is the one used for "thank" there (Lk. 17:9). The point is that we don't receive grace because of our going the extra mile, as we are inclined to think. We receive grace, but not as a result of all our special efforts; these are what are expected of us, on account of the fact that we have become salves to our Master, the Lord Jesus. At the end of all our special efforts (in whatever sphere), we must consciously make an effort to recognize that we are "unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10). This must surely connect with Mt. 25:30, which describes the rejected at the day of judgment as unprofitable servants. If we judge / condemn ourselves, we will not be condemned (1 Cor. 11:31). This is just one of many examples of where the Lord's parables seem intended to be linked with each other- which further proves that they are not stories with a deeper meaning, whose storyline is not intended to be carefully considered. We must recognize not only that we are unprofitable servants, but that we have only done what was our "duty" or debt to do- the implication being that we were sold into slavery on account of an unpayable debt. This is exactly the figure used by the Lord to describe us in Mt. 18:25.

25:31

In Mt. 25:31-46 we have a parable depicting the last judgment, where the Lord sits as judge and we come before Him. Usually, a person comes before a judge regarding things which they have committed wrongly. But our expectations, which are set up by the story of a judge and people coming before him in judgment, are shattered. The issues the people are judged about aren't acts of commission. It's all about what they *omitted* to do, continuing the theme of the preceding parable of the talents, which concludes with the one talent man being condemned for what he omitted to do. We tend to be all so freaked out about our committed sins, rather than realizing the tremendous importance the Lord attaches to our *omissions* of acts of kindness and thoughtful love, and perceiving the image of Christ in our brethren. It's rather like how Paul starts writing to the Corinthians. He doesn't start as we might have done with their gross immorality, false doctrine, perversion of the Lord's supper into a drunken orgy [although he comes to those things]… rather, he

begins with and spends most time discussing their lack of love, their divisiveness etc.

It is worth observing the very simple fact that the New Testament is essentially a missionary document- all the expressions and articulations of doctrine / theology found there are all in the context of the preaching of the Gospel and the immediate problems of men and women in responding to it. This is why we aren't given a cold statement of faith or catechism in the New Testament, but rather the history of the mission of Christ at its first beginning. Even parables like that of Mt. 25:31-46 were relevant in a missionary context- regarding the perils of not supporting the itinerant missionaries in the first century. And this is why the power of the early Christian witness lay in who they were- for this was the real advertisement for the doctrine they preached.

But when the Son of Man shall come in his glory- A clear allusion to Dan. 7:13, which is interpreted later in Daniel 7 as referring to the coming of Jesus with the accepted believers with Him. There is a sense in which we will be involved with judging others; thus the men of Nineveh will condemn the first century Jews at the day of judgment (Mt. 12:41). In this case, the judgment of the nations could be a judgment of people from all nations concerning how they have treated the faithful who were recently under tribulation in all nations. This would make good sense of the allusion to Joel 3:2 "I will gather all nations… into judgment" which we have in :32. The nations gathered to judgment in Armageddon or at least, in Israel somewhere, would then be judged according to how they have treated God's people. However, the stubborn problem for this interpretation is the reward given to some of these unbelievers- eternal life in the Kingdom just for helping God's people under persecution. Such salvation is surely predicated upon faith in Christ, rather than the doing of good works.

And all the Angels with Him- If all the Angels accompany the Lord Jesus and relocate from Heaven to earth, then we can better understand why the Kingdom of God on earth is described as "the Kingdom of Heaven". The future Kingdom of God seems to involve Heaven, including God Himself, ultimately, descending from Heaven to earth. This is certainly the scene presented in the final chapters of Revelation.

Then he shall sit on the throne of his glory- The Lord's throne is the restored throne of David, in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is called the throne of God's glory (Jer. 14:21, and Mt. 23:22 may have the same reference), and the Lord's glory is ultimately God's glory. But His glory is ultimately His character and personality- God's revelation of His glory to Moses was the revelation of His Name and character. Yet the Son attained that glory through His own perfectly God-like character, and this is the basis upon which He shall be enthroned as King of the cosmos. There is surely here also a reference to Zech. 6:13, where the Messianic "Branch" sits upon a

throne of glory and rebuilds the temple. But that prophecy was clearly intended to have had a fulfilment in Zerubbabel's intended rebuilding of the temple when the exiles returned. But the exiles who returned, and their leadership especially, dropped the batton. The intended temple outlined in Ezekiel 40-48 was not built by them. And so the prophecy was rescheduled in fulfilment. Not every detail needs to be literally fulfilled [e.g. the rebuilding of a temple], but the essence will be fulfilled in the second coming of Christ to earth. The Lord spoke of how the disciples would sit with Him in His throne of glory (Rev. 3:21), judging the twelve tribes of Israel (19:28). This would support our earlier suggestion that the Son of Man coming in judgment is in fact a picture of the Lord Jesus along with the faithful coming in judgment. This is why there are thrones [plural] of judgment (Rev. 20:4). The contrast is with the man of sin, who at that time will also be sitting upon a throne in the temple (2 Thess. 2:4 s.w.); the Lord Jesus shall come and depose him.

25:32 *And before Him- Emprosthen* could just as well mean 'against' Him, referring to the gathering of the nations against Christ which is spoken of in Joel 3, Zechariah 14 and Psalm 2. But the sense is likely the more obvious one, of being gathered in front of Him.

Shall be gathered- See on :31 *The Son of Man shall come in his glory*. This is a figure used about the gathering of individuals to judgment and both to condemnation and salvation (3:12; 13:30; 24:28; Jn. 15:6 "men gather them and cast them into the fire"; "bring / gather here, and slay them before Me", Lk. 19:27). And yet right now the gathering is going on as the net of Gospel preaching gathers in people (13:47; 22:10; the fragments are gathered that no man be lost, Jn. 6:12, the other sheep are brought / gathered into the fold, Jn. 10:16). Our first steps in responding to the Gospel call are in fact our first steps towards meeting the Lord at judgment. The Lord has just been falsely accused of gathering where He did not sow, and therefore I suggest that those gathered are those from all nations who have received the seed of the Kingdom message. When we are called to judgment, the immediacy of our response will be a summary of how we have progressively responded to that call to go to Jesus. But the word for 'gather' is used extensively by the Lord in this section of His teaching. The one talent man has complained that the Lord is unreasonably gathering him to judgment (25:24), and the Lord now goes on to say that indeed people from all nations will be gathered to Him. And He goes further to say that the basis of acceptability with Him is whether we 'gathered' [AV "took me in"] *Him* in this life, when He was manifested to us in the least of His brethren (:35,38). Again we see the idea of mutuality. We gather Him, He gathers us. And this will be literally, visibly manifest in that when the call comes, those who voluntarily, immediately gather towards Him will be confirmed in that by being snatched away towards Him, and will thereby

come with Him in glory to His throne (1 Thess. 4:16,17). The nations will gather themselves together against Christ at the last day (Rev. 16:14,16; Psalm 2, s.w. Acts 4:26).

All the nations- Frequently, New Testament references to “all men” really means “all true believers” or those who have become responsible to God. Hebrews 2:14 states that Christ killed the devil (the power of sin) on the cross; but this is only true for those in Christ. Those who are ignorant of the saving power of God’s Truth are under the active control of sin- the Biblical devil. Revelation 20:5 speaks of “the dead” as those responsible to judgment, whereas many other Bible passages show that not all the dead will be raised. Only those who have heard the Gospel will be resurrected to judgment. Thus “the dead” in God’s usage does not refer to everyone who has ever died. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 speaks of “the dead” as those in Christ. Matthew 25:32 describes “all nations” coming before Christ for judgment. This indicates that to God, the world He sees is comprised of those who are responsible to Him; not literally “all nations” will come before Christ, only those people from them who are responsible to Him. We must surely read in an ellipsis here, 'People from all nations', because the Gospel will have gone to all nations before the Lord returns (24:14). The great commission to take the Gospel to all nations (28:19 s.w.) will finally have been fulfilled. Knowledge of the Gospel is the basis of accountability to judgment, and that fact alone means that if people from all nations come to judgment, then the Gospel must have gone to all nations; the believers [spiritual Israel] will be persecuted in all nations (24:9 s.w.) at the same time as Jews [natural Israel] are lead away captive into all nations (Lk. 21:24) and this likely will be the basis of our witness to all nations, just as the early church needed persecution to make them take the Gospel to the Gentiles. If we do that now in this day of opportunity, maybe that final persecution by "all nations" will be unnecessary. The whole scenario could have been allowed a first century fulfilment in that Jews from all nations were converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:5 s.w.), but clearly they did not return home and take the Gospel further to the Gentiles of literally all nations. it took Peter until the Cornelius incident to realize that people from literally all nations could be accepted (Acts 10:35 s.w. "all nations"), but the church generally struggled with that understanding. Rev. 14:6 explains that only in the last days will the Gospel go to all nations, during the tribulation period; only when God's judgments are revealed in maybe literally the very last days before the Lord's coming will people from "all nations" come to Him (Rev. 15:4).

And he shall separate them- The separation between sheep and goats is not, therefore, ultimately visible now. Mt. 13:49 uses the same word to describe how "the Angels" shall do this work of separation. And yet the

essence of separation does go on in this life, insofar as men "shall separate [s.w.] you from their company" (Lk. 6:22; Acts 19:9). The final judgment will be a confirmation of processes which have been ongoing in our lives today. Likewise, separating ourselves from our brethren as Peter did in weakness due to political pressures (Gal. 2:12 s.w.) is effectively separating ourselves from the sheep, and placing ourselves with the goats. Significantly, the only other occurrence of the phrase "from one another" is in Acts 15:39, where Paul and Barnabas "departed asunder the one from the other". The Greek translated "separate" in these passages means to set a boundary, a limit. And in this lies the danger of the misuse of Statements of Faith and legalistic fellowship boundaries. Any drawing of a line in the wrong place can lead to our condemnation, so it's better to be open to all our brethren.

One from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats- Sheep and goats were similar looking. The sheep of the first century would typically have been dirty and with dark patches, making it possible to separate them from goats only by an experienced shepherd who knew his flock. The point may have been that from a distance, sheep and goats looked quite similar. The Lord Jesus was the shepherd during His ministry, and commented that "I know My sheep" (Jn. 10:14). He knew who were the goats and who the sheep. But His judgment will only be made manifest in the last day. But the purpose of the last judgment is not, therefore, to gather information about us; for the judgment in essence is ongoing now as we live our lives before the shepherd of our souls.

The way the Lord speaks of dividing the sheep from the goats and not vice versa could suggest that there are far fewer sheep compared to goats (Mt. 25:32). This would imply that the majority of those who are responsible are in the goat category. The word used for 'goat' here strictly means a kid, and the purpose of the division may well have been because the goats were to be killed for meat.

25:33 *And he shall set*- Gk. 'to stand'.

The sheep on his right hand- The paradox is that seeing the Lord will be facing the people, His right hand is their left hand. Those who place themselves at His left hand from their perspective, those who condemn themselves, are thereby on His right hand, and saved. The Lord Himself was rewarded with a place on the right hand (of the Father), and He shares that reward with His people by likewise placing them on the right hand.

And the goats on the left- The Greek *euo-numos* means literally the good named or good omened. The Greeks understood the left hand as being

the side of good fortune. The Lord turned this idea upside down. His culture is radically different to that of the world.

Initially, it does not appear that there will be much compulsion to come to the judgment. After a meeting of the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17), both sheep and goats eventually appear before the judgment seat. The point has been made that when the Angels first come to call us to judgment at the second coming (Matt. 13:39), there will be an element of choice as to whether we immediately accept the call to go and meet Christ. "In that day" we will have the choice to go and take our goods from the house, or to go immediately with the Lord (Lk. 17:31). Under the law, the trumpet sounded and Israel had to gather themselves together (Num. 10:4); yet Paul says in Thessalonians that the Lord comes with a trumpet to gather His people together. If this is indeed based upon the Old Testament pattern, then there is an element of choice as to whether we gather ourselves unto Him- at least initially. Noah and Lot were invited, not forced, to leave the world. Those who respond to Christ's return "immediately" will be accepted, implying that the unworthy delay. This means that the response is optional in the first instance (Lk. 12:36). There are other indications of this. The most obvious is in the parable of the virgins, where the wise go out to meet their Lord immediately, whilst the foolish delay in order to spiritually prepare themselves. Our attitude in that split second is so vital. The rejected will mourn and wail, in anticipation of their future condemnation, when they see the sign of the Son of man indicating His imminent coming (Mt. 24:30,31). And this is why there is the implication that effectively, the division between sheep and goats happens in the gathering process (Mt. 25:33); our response to the gathering is our judgment. The parables invite us to see the Lord gathering the wheat to one place and the tares to another, as if the gathering is the judgment (Mt. 13:30); the wheat is gathered to the garner, and the chaff to the place of burning (Mt. 3:12). The Angel who reaps for judgment 'thrusts in' his sickle, and 'casts out' the wicked in rejection (Rev. 14:19). But 'thrust in' and 'cast out' in that verse both translate the same Greek word *ballo*- the implication being that the gathering-to-judgment process is in fact the separation process. Likewise the net is "cast" into the sea in order to gather people for judgment, and then the rejected are "cast" away (Mt. 13:47,48).

25:34 *Then*- If indeed the Lord comes to judgment with the faithful with Him (in line with the allusions to the Son of Man of Daniel 7, the faithful saints, coming in judgment), then we would have a chronological problem- if the sheep here represent the responsible from all ages standing before Him. We note too that He speaks to them of "the least of these My brethren" (:40), as if His brethren are standing somehow in another group. These considerations have led some to think that the

group now being judged are those who have ministered to the Lord's people during their final tribulation. The nakedness, being in prison etc. is exactly the language of persecution found in Rom. 8:35. But I think this is unnecessary, and this suggestion in turn raises problems when analysed further- for will unbelievers in the world enter eternal life and the Kingdom simply on the basis of good works? And the whole language of gathering and separation [as demonstrated above] is elsewhere used about the judgment of all the responsible at the judgment seat of Christ. It seems to me that there is abundant evidence for a collapse of time and space at the period around the Lord's coming. This means that such chronological issues need not concern us. Another possibility is that there are various possible chronologies of events in the last days, and there may be different scenarios for the gathering and judgment of the Lord's people.

The King shall say to those on his right hand: Come- The invitation to come to Him is what we respond to now, in this life, in daily situations (11:28; 19:21; 22:4; Mk. 10:21 s.w.). The judgment seat will simply be a continuation of that principle. Perhaps "*Come"* suggests a hesitancy of the faithful to enter the Kingdom. Ps. 36:8 says that God will "make us" partake of the blessings of the Kingdom of God. It reminds us of how the Lord Jesus said that in his Kingdom, He will "make us" sit down at a table, and He will come and serve us (Lk. 12:37), knowing full well that he who sits at meat is greater than he who serves (Lk. 22:27). It isn't so difficult to imagine this scene: the Lord of glory wanting us to sit down to a meal, and then *He* comes and serves us. He *will* have to "make us" sit down and let ourselves be served. And perhaps the way the Lord had to 'make' the healed blind man look up and use his new sight was some kind of foretaste of this. There is even the suggestion in Rev. 7:15 that after the judgment process, the Lord will come down off His throne and mix with us, after the pattern of Joseph.

Blessed of my Father- The Greek means literally those who are praised. The Greek *eu-logeo* is literally those who are spoken well of. And this is exactly what the Lord proceeds to do. He praises the righteous, bewildered as they appear to be, for their good works. Righteousness is imputed to them. This connects with other New Testament pictures of the righteous being praised by the Father and Son at the last day.

These words are spoken collectively: "Come, *ye* (not 'thou', singular) blessed... *ye* [plural] gave me meat... then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, When saw *we* thee an hungered...". Yet we know that there must be an individual judgment. These words sound as if we are all judged together, at the same time. Again, the reconciliation of this is in appreciating that the meaning of time will be collapsed. In similar vein, the rejected going off to try to get oil and then turning up later at the judgment (Mt. 25:10) probably describes a process that occurs in the

minds of the people, rather than something which occurs in real time- although it may *feel* like real time to them. The existence of these two groups at the judgment explains how the men of Nineveh and Sheba will "rise up in the judgment" and condemn the rejected Jews; if they are in the group of sheep facing the group of goats in which the faithless Jews will be. The wicked will walk naked, and the accepted believers will then see their shame (Rev. 16:15). The rejected will experience "shame and everlasting contempt" at the judgment (Dan. 12:2). Shame and contempt must be in the eyes of others- i.e. the group of 'sheep'?

"My Father" suggests that the King is therefore the Lord Jesus. Yet He judges as God because God has given Him authority to do this, because He is the Son of Man (Jn. 5:27).

Inherit the kingdom- 'Be heirs of'. But we are right now "heirs of the Kingdom" (James 2:5 s.w.). What we are now by status will be realised in a more physical sense. Note that inheriting the Kingdom parallels inheriting the earth (5:5), inheriting eternal life (19:29), inheriting incorruption (1 Cor. 15:50), inheriting salvation (Heb. 1:14), inheriting the promises (Heb. 6:12) and "all things" (Rev. 21:7). In no way could these things have been inherited in AD70. These words of Jesus at the judgment, inviting the faithful into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:34), rung in Paul's mind: Acts 20:32; Gal. 3:29; 4:7; Eph. 1:11; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Tit. 3:7.

Prepared for you- We each have a specific, unique role being prepared for us in eternity; and the process of that preparation is ongoing now, and is the reason for all our current experiences. This brief life prepares us for eternity, who and what we shall eternally be; this is why life is so intense now, even if at times it seems so repetitious. We prepare ourselves (Lk. 12:47 "that servant.... prepared not himself", "His wife has prepared herself", Rev. 19:7; 21:2 s.w.), and God works through this in preparing us. This perhaps explains the irregular dative translated "for you"- it could equally mean 'prepared *by* you'. The 'preparation' of God's people for that eternity was a major theme of John the Baptist, and it involved repentance (Lk. 1:76; 3:4). The cross was a major part in that preparation (Jn. 14:2,3 s.w.); each of us was somehow represented in Christ then. We are now being "prepared unto good works" (2 Tim. 2:21)- which we shall eternally do. For the Kingdom of God will not be a passive state. We will be active in the good works for which we are now being prepared. I have made the point that the parables of Matthew 25 all address the issue of preparedness for the Lord's coming with which He concluded the Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24. He concluded it with an appeal to be "ready", the same word as "prepared" here (24:44). If we have this sense of being prepared for an eternity of service, then we will be prepared for His coming even though we don't know the day nor hour.

The parable of the pounds describes the reward of the faithful in terms of being given ten or five cities (Lk. 19:17). This idea of dividing up groups of cities was surely meant to send the mind back to the way Israel in their wilderness years were each promised their own individual cities and villages, which they later inherited. The idea of inheriting "ten cities" occurs in Josh. 15:57; 21:5,26; 1 Chron. 6:61 (all of which are in the context of the priests receiving their cities), and "five cities" in 1 Chron. 4:32. As each Israelite was promised some personal inheritance in the land, rather than some blanket reward which the while nation received, so we too have a personal reward prepared. The language of inheritance (e.g. 1 Pet. 1:4) and preparation of reward (Mt. 25:34; Jn. 14:1) in the NT is alluding to this OT background of the land being prepared by the Angels for Israel to inherit (Ex. 15:17 Heb.; 23:20; Ps. 68:9,10 Heb.). We must be careful not to think that our promised inheritance is *only* eternal life; it is something being personally prepared for each of us. The language of preparation seems inappropriate if our reward is only eternal life.

From the foundation of the world- In a literal sense, perhaps, our unique genetic structure has been under preparation from the beginning. We were intended to be who we are and to do something specific for the Lord, to be someone unique, throughout eternity. For we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), our names / personalities written from the foundation of the world (Rev. 17:8).

25:35 *For I was hungry and you gave me to eat*- The Lord was hungry (21:18; Lk. 6:3), wanting to be satiated by fruit on the fig tree, the repentance of Israel.

I was thirsty and you gave me drink- The Lord was thirsty, and satiated by the food and drink of the Samaritan woman's interest in the Gospel (Jn. 4:13,14). She 'gave Him to drink' (Jn. 4:7); the same words are used here. And He thirsted on the cross (Jn. 19:28) and was 'given to drink'- the same words are used (Mk. 15:36). Hunger, thirst, prison and nakedness are all part of the sufferings of Gospel preachers (1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27). It may be that Matthew is making this connection because he sought to remind his converts of the need to support the itinerant preachers who were going around reciting the Gospel of Matthew at his time. Further, the spread of the Gospel worldwide is one of the preconditions for the Lord's return, according to the preceding Olivet prophecy. And the point is being made that those who do this are to be supported.

The Lord’s focus on the positive is shown by the way He quotes Job 22:7 in the parable of the sheep and goats: “Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry”. These words are part of Eliphaz’s erroneous allegations against Job- for Job was a perfect man, and not guilty on these counts. Yet the Lord extracts

elements of truth from those wrong words, rather than just contemptuously ignoring them. Likewise Job 22:25 speaks of God being our “treasure… our precious silver” (RV). Surely the Lord had this in mind when saying that our treasure must be laid up “in heaven”, i.e. with God (for He often uses ‘Heaven’ for ‘God’). And James follows suite by approvingly quoting Job 22:29 about the lifting up of the humble (James 4:6).

A stranger I was a stranger and you welcomed me- The Lord was buried in the place of "strangers" (27:7 s.w.); He was treated as a Gentile especially in His death on the cross. "Welcomed" is the same word translated "gathered" in :32. As they gathered Him, so He now gathers them.

25:36 *Naked*- The Lord Jesus was naked or at least without clothing on the cross.

And you clothed Me- As the believers clothed Him, so He will clothe them (Rev. 3:5; 7:9; 19:8; being clothed upon with immortality is definitely a picture of salvation). He will act spiritually to us, in terms of salvation, as we have acted materially to His brethren as they in their lives, as the body of Christ, experience various aspects of His life, sufferings and death.

Sick- Gk. 'weak'. "He was crucified in *weakness*... we also are *weak* in Him" (2 Cor. 13:4). His crucifixion 'weakness' is manifest in all who are in Him, part of His body. Both in His life and supremely in His death, the Lord carried our weakness / sickness (Mt. 8:17, quoting from the prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus in Isaiah 53). He fully shared in "our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15 s.w.) and was "compassed with infirmity / weakness" (Heb. 5:2 s.w.). Clearly the weakness / sickness of the Lord is to be found in all those in Him, and we are to minister to that as we would minister to Him personally.

1 Cor. 8:9 is one of several passages which warn us not to make “the weak” to stumble. There are weak members amongst every group of believers, and therefore we should watch our behaviour, because it will have an effect upon whoever is weak. But this doesn't mean that *we* actually know who the weak ones are. Because we don't know who is especially weak we must always be careful in our behaviour, *whoever* we are with. Indeed, we have to adopt the perspective that in a sense we are *all* weak. The Greek word translated "weak" usually means one of two things: physical illness, or spiritual weakness. Sometimes these two senses are combined (e.g. when James speaks of praying for the "sick" brother, or when Jesus talks of how pleased he was that brethren had visited the "sick" brother in Mt. 25:36).

Paul often uses the word in his letters to Corinth. He says that we are *all* weak because of our natures (1 Cor. 15:43), and that Christ died on account of the fact that we are weak (2 Cor. 13:4 Gk.). Because of this, Paul reasons, we're all weak, because Christ died for every one of us. He therefore says that to sin against a weak brother is to sin against Christ; because Christ has associated himself with our spiritual weakness, in order to save us from it (1 Cor. 8:12). Thus he says that when we visit a weak brother (spiritually? it's the same word), we visit *him*. He so closely associates himself with the weak brother. Christ on the cross carried the sins of "the weak" (i.e. all of us), and thereby left us an example of how we should behave towards the "weak". In this context, Paul says that we should likewise love our neighbour (in the ecclesia; Rom. 15:1-4). What he seems to be saying is that we should understand that we are *all* weak, and therefore try to help each other, in the same spirit as Christ died for the weakness of each of us. If we recognize that we are *all* weak, we'll avoid two common mistakes: 1) Thinking that some brethren aren't weak and should therefore be followed blindly; and 2) Thinking that some believers are "weak" whilst the rest of us are "strong". Paul didn't want the Corinth ecclesia to think he was wagging the finger at them and implying: 'You lot are so weak, but I'm strong'. Several times he speaks of his own weakness, and he glories in the fact that although he is so (spiritually) weak, God works through him so mightily; indeed, he comes to the conclusion that God's strength is perfectly expressed through his spiritual weaknesses (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5,9,10). He says that he preached to Corinth in the first place in (spiritual) "weakness" (1 Cor. 2:3)- because it seems that when he first got to Corinth, he wasn't spiritually strong enough to grasp the nettle of witnessing to the city as he should have done (Acts 18:9,10). Having admitted to Corinth that he himself was weak, he can say that whenever one of them is weak, he feels weak too; in other words he's saying that he can totally empathize (not just sympathize) with a weak brother's feelings (2 Cor. 11:29).

And you visited Me- The idea is not really to pop around to someone's house or hospital ward. The idea really is of identity, with a view to salvation. Thus God visited us in Christ to save us (Lk. 1:68,78; 7:16 "God has visited His people"; Acts 15:14 God "visited the Gentiles to take out a people"; Heb. 2:6 "what is man that You visit him"). This is the 'visiting' in view. As He ultimately 'visits' us to save, crossing the huge distance between God and man to do so, likewise we are to 'visit' our brethren. Again, what we do materially for those in Christ is a reflection of what He spiritually does for us. This is to be the motivation; to perceive that their poverty, their imprisonment, all of which may be their fault, is a reflection of our spiritual need and poverty, as we like them miss chance after chance to pull ourselves out of our poverty, and fall down too easily into survival and coping mechanisms that bind us to our poverty. And we are to show the same compassionate care to them as the Lord does to

us.

I was in prison and you came to me- Prison is a metaphor for where sin and spiritual debt leads us. We are all hopelessly in spiritual debt and therefore in the debtors' prison (18:30). The Gospel which saves us is of freedom for the spiritual prisoners. And we are to reflect that experience in visiting others in prison, even if it is their fault they are there, just as it's our fault that we too are imprisoned spiritually. And "prison" was understood by Peter as a fair description of the Lord's sufferings, "to prison and to death" (Lk. 22:33). In His death, the Lord went to the "spirits in prison", He was with them / us there (1 Pet. 3:19). But "prison" wasn't necessarily understood as a building with "Prison" written on it. Legion was 'bound', imprisoned, with fetters (Lk. 8:29 s.w.); and yet still free. Likewise Paul was 'bound' or 'imprisoned' to a soldier (Acts 28:16 s.w.). The Lord's binding could therefore be fairly understood as an imprisonment. And He was imprisoned at least for 24 hours before His death. The wonder of all this is that those imprisoned even by the effect of their own sin are thus still fellowshipping the Lord's crucifixion sufferings; and we are to minister to them as we would have done to Christ on the cross. Would we not have rushed to provide something in response to His plea "I thirst"? Of course. But we are to do so in response to the need of His brethren. Even "the least" of them, who are suffering for their sins.

So we can say that hunger, thirst, being a stranger, naked, weak and imprisoned are all things which the Lord experienced during His life and especially in His death. His brethren, His body, share His sufferings. We are to minister to them as we would have done were we there beholding the sufferings of Christ on the cross. We should emerge from such 'beholding', as we do it at the memorial meeting, practically resolving to reflect it to His brethren. And we are the more motivated by realizing that all those situations of hunger, thirst, imprisonment, weakness and nakedness are in fact metaphors for our own spiritual poverty, which the Lord through the cross responded to, in utter grace. As He has done spiritually to us, so we are to do, spiritually and materially, to others. All those symptoms of poverty are often (although far from always) the result of mismanagement, weak motivation, unhealthy coping patterns, chronically missed chances… and yet in spiritual terms, those things are the story of our lives. In the materially poor we see exact reflections of ourselves, of our spiritual poverty and failures. As the Lord has graciously responded to us in our weakness and self-inflicted poverty, so we are to do so to His people.

25:37 *Then the righteous shall answer him, saying: Lord*- The parable implies the day of judgment will be such a surprise. Both righteous and wicked will find that they are criticized and commended for things which surprise them. There are several indications that because of this, the

rejected will begin to argue back with Christ (e.g. Mt. 7:22), until eventually they realize their errors, stop speaking (Mt. 22:12) and gnash their teeth in anger against themselves (Mt. 22:13). This should truly be a sobering thought to us all. We must strive, really, to examine ourselves, to know ourselves, to try to see our motives and actions a little more from God's perspective; because it is His perspective, not ours, which is ultimately important; and it is this lesson which the day of judgment will ultimately teach each of us.

When did we see you hungry and fed you? Or thirsty and gave you drink?- "See", *eido*, means effectively 'to know'. The Lord has just used the same word in warning that He will have to tell the foolish virgins "I know you not" (:12). Here He explains that this is in fact because they knew *Him* not, in that they didn't recognize His brethren. To not recognize His brethren means that He will not recognize us. It becomes crucial, therefore, to recognize the Lord's brethren- and upholding a statement of faith as a basis of brotherhood seems to be a sure way *not* to do that. Such a system may work well in secular life, but in spiritual terms, we end up creating fellowship boundaries which effectively treat others as not the Lord's brethren because we do not recognize them as *our* brethren, seeing they fail to meet some curious criteria of theology or practice.

One major characteristic of the judgment will be *surprise*- for both rejected and accepted (Mt. 25:37,44). Firstly, incomprehension (Mt. 25:37) and surprised anger, then realisation of the Lord's verdict. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44). The judgment will be a surprise for all. The thought that at least some of our deeds will be discussed with us at the judgment should surely make some impact on our present behaviour. Lk. 19:23 implies not only that there will be a discussion with our judge, but that Jesus will point out to the rejected what they should have done to be accepted: "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee... wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank?". The rejected are to be cut in two, shown as the two faced hypocrites which they were. But the idea of cutting in two was immediately associated in the Jewish mind with making a covenant. When Abraham placed the sacrifices in two parts and the Lord passed between them, the idea was really that God would cut in two the man who broke the covenant. Hence the Jews spoke of 'cutting a covenant'. Those who have made the covenant with God but not kept it will be cut in two, as they initially agreed. God will keep His side of the covenant.

We need to observe that the goats are rejected not so much for their lack of actions, but for failing to discern Christ in the least of His brethren. Then, the rejected will finally see their good works in context. They will realize how little works really meant. The faithful already knew that- for

they objected when the Lord told them all the good things they had done. The list of works in Mt. 25:35,36 include the following: giving food to the hungry, clothes to the naked, a bed to the homeless, help to the sick. Yet these are the very things which Job claims he had done, when he clears himself from all his accusers (Job 31:17-20). But the voice in the whirlwind soon reduced him to realize "I am vile"; all his good works became as filthy rags before the supremacy of salvation by grace alone. The connection with the parable isn't merely incidental. Surely the Lord is saying that the self-righteous in the ecclesia may seem as righteous as Job was before his conversion; but they must either in this life realize the totality of grace, or the whirlwind of judgment condemnation will reduce them to the same realization. Job seems to oscillate between believing and not believing in the resurrection (consider Job 14:7-15). At the end, Job confesses he has not spoken the right things; and Yahweh then says that he has only spoken that which was right. The friends likewise said some true things and some false things; and yet because they did not repent, their bad words were remembered against them. The final revealing of Yahweh in Job was some kind of judgment day for all concerned. Job, the righteous, had only his good deeds and words remembered; whereas the wicked friends had only their bad words remembered. It seems it will take a while for the penny to drop for the rejected- that they're "out", and actually never were "in". This Jesus, in whose presence they had broken bread (although note the difference between this and Jesus breaking bread with us, Lk. 13:26 cp. Mt. 26:29), actually doesn't know them. The Lord has to repeat the very same words twice to the rejected: "I know not whence you are" (Lk. 13:25,27)- as if they are dumbfounded and slow to comprehend the eternal implications of His words.

The righteous gave to the poor, the sick, the hungry- without even realizing they had done it. They will confidently deny it when Jesus points it all out to them. They served with no expectation of reward; so much so that they even forgot what they did. And *every* one who is accepted at the judgment, all the sheep, will have been like that. Giving without any thought of getting anything back is a *must* for all of us who seek to truly manifest God: for this is exactly what He does and has done, minute by minute, down through the millennia of indifferent, unresponsive human history (Lk. 6:35,36). The accepted will feel so certain of all this that they will almost argue with the Lord Jesus at the day of judgment that he hasn't made the right decision concerning them (Mt. 25:37-40). It's only a highly convicted man who would dare do that. Thus the Father will have to comfort the faithful in the aftermath of the judgment, wiping away the tears which will *then* (see context) be in our eyes, and give us special help to realize that our sinful past has now finally been overcome (Rev. 21:4). We will be like the labourers in the parable who walk away from judgment clutching their penny, thinking “I really shouldn't have this. I didn't work for a day, and this is a day's pay". Therefore if we honestly,

genuinely feel that we won't be in the Kingdom, well, this is how in some ways the faithful will all feel.

There is surely an intended contrast between the accepted denying the righteous acts that the Lord reminds them of, and their telling Him how much they have gained (spiritually) by trading (Mt. 25:37-39 cp. 20,22). These quite different attributes of the accepted are recorded within the same speech of the Lord. He frames those parables as if He is getting over global lessons rather than describing the response of different people. Perhaps the point is that first of all, the accepted feel as if they have done no righteous acts, and feel their unworthiness so strongly that they even dare to genuinely disagree with the Lord's praise of them. But then they come to accept themselves as He sees them, and later on in the judgment dialogue, He teases out of them a realistic self-assessment of their spiritual growth. There is a similar intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that well, He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 4 cp. 25).

25:38 *And when did we see you as a stranger and welcome you? Or naked and clothed you?*- They were commendably unaware that they had done these things. Or perhaps the focus is upon the word "You". Their genuine surprise is because they had never realized the degree to which their actions to their brethren were done directly to their Lord.

25:39 *And when did we see you sick, or in prison and came to you?*- The parable of the sheep and goats clearly suggests that after the judgment, the worthy and unworthy will be in two distinct groups to the right and left hand side of the Lord. The group of "sheep" then enter the Kingdom all together, at the same moment. This explains how the Lord will address the faithful and unfaithful as groups (note "ye" in Mt. 25:37,39); how the men of Nineveh stand together in a group, as the men of Sodom and Gomorrah will (Mt. 12:41; Mk. 6:11). In some way, there will be a collective sense at the day of judgment, as well as an individual one. If there will be a collective sense then, before the presence of His glory... there ought to be now.

At judgment day, the Lord will commend the righteous for feeding Him etc.- and they will reply in genuine surprise, feeling that they truly have *not* done any of those things for which He commends them. The point is, their way of life was an unconscious doing of good; it is the mindset which legalistically remembers every act of righteousness which will be finally rejected.

25:40 *And the King*- The day of judgment was an important theme with the Lord. There is an element of unreality in the way he speaks of the King as being the judge (Mt. 25:40); the implication is that our judgment will be an extremely important event; the King himself is the judge (actually, the King of heaven and earth). This indicates that the Lord wishes to put before us the picture of those who have been called to the Kingdom but reject His offer.

Shall answer and say to them- They answer to Him (:37), and He likewise to them.

Truly I say to you, inasmuch- The Greek suggests an exact correspondence. Whatever is done to the Lord's brethren is done to Him. This is the point of the Lord's teaching. He is not simply saying that if we do good practical works we shall be saved, and if we don't, then we shall not be. He is saying that it is what is done or not done *to Him* which is significant. So the point of the teaching is an appeal to recognize and serve His brethren, rather than to simply do good works. The rejected of Mt. 7:22 "*did* many wonderful works"- and the same word is used here, "you *did it* unto one of the least of these my brothers". It's not so much works that are being appealed for, as recognition of the Lord in His brethren. It's the same word used in :16 for the faithful man who 'made' talents for his Lord. The making of talents is therefore parallel with serving the Lord's brethren. It's also the word used in 24:46 [which introduces the parables of chapter 25]- the watching servant will be found 'doing' care for his brethren.

As you did it to one of these my brothers- This word may seem superfluous until we realize that 'one of the least of these' is an invitation to look at the group of sheep and focus upon any one of the faces. This is a unique insight into the day of judgment. We are enabled to imagine ourselves there. The Lord is inviting us to imagine the colossal importance of perceiving Him in His brethren, and treating them as Him. If only this principle were understood in church life now, the church would be a beacon of light in this world's darkness. All rejection, spitefulness, hard speaking against other believers… would disappear. We are to treat others in Christ as if they were Him. And that is the basis of our acceptance or rejection.

Even the least, you did it to me- See on :34 *Then*. The 'little ones' in the Lord's earlier teaching are believers in Him (10:40-42; 18:6,10,14). 10:42 is strikingly similar: "And whoever gives one of these *little ones* even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple; truly I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward". The least of the Lord's brethren refer to His disciples, and not to needy humanity generally. The purpose of the parable is to continue the theme of watchfulness which began at the end of chapter 24. There the Lord taught that watchfulness and readiness for His return will be achieved by feeding the household, and

here that is defined in terms of practical care for His brethren. Careful reflection on the parable surely indicates that the Lord doesn't condemn people for not doing acts of kindness; that would be salvation by works. Rather is the basis of their condemnation whether or not they perceived the Christ in the least of the Christ's brethren. The Lord's point is that things were done or not done *to Him*. If He meant 'If you feed the hungry, you're a sheep; if you don't, you're a goat', He would have expressed it otherwise. He's not teaching salvation by works, but rather the crucial importance of perceiving Himself in His brethren and not denying their connection with Him. This lifts the whole issue to a far more personal and demanding level than doing a few acts of kindness to needy folks.

The 'least' of the Lord's brethren are those who are spiritually weak. The "least in the Kingdom" are those who break commandments and teach others so (5:19 s.w.); Paul felt "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:9 s.w.), "the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8 s.w.). The parable describes those on whom the righteous expend effort as sick, hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, in prison: *every one of which* is a description used elsewhere in Scripture concerning our spiritually weak state. Therefore the parable is teaching that one of the grounds upon which we will be rejected or accepted relates to how we have treated spiritually weak brethren. The wondrous, wondrous thing is that the Lord of glory identifies himself with the spiritually *weakest* of his brethren: and structures his judgment seat around how others have behaved towards them. Yet the description of "the least" brethren exactly match the Lord's own experience in His death- one who is imprisoned (Mt. 26:50), sick (Mt. 27:26), naked (Mt. 27:35), thirsty (Mt. 26:29; 27:48), friendless like a stranger (Mt. 26:56). In responding to "the least" of the Lord's brethren, we are responding to His cross. For our brethren, in their poverty, nakedness and imprisonment, are fellowshipping the sufferings of their Lord.

As He says "Of these", we imagine a nod towards the crowd of sheep, with an invitation to focus upon "one" of those faces. There will be a public element to the judgment process. This is why the rejected shall walk naked and have their shame seen by others (Rev. 16:15). The purpose of judgment is to teach us all, to prepare us for eternity together as we behold each other's lives revealed and perceive the same patterns of God's amazing grace. This is why hypocrisy is pointless; we shall then be revealed for who we really are before all.

25:41 *Then he shall also say to them on the left hand: You who are cursed, depart from me*- The same word has just been used about the foolish virgins when they were told to "Go [s.w. 'depart']" to buy more oil (:9). The rejected will be told: "Depart from me" (Lk. 13:27); and yet in their lives, they will have already departed themselves. In time of temptation some *fall away* (s.w. "depart from"; Lk. 8:13).

Some *depart* (s.w.) from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12). Demas departed (2 Tim. 4:10), as the rejected will depart (s.w. here in Mt. 25:41). The same word is used about how the seed sown among thorns *goes forth*, it departs (Lk. 8:14) to condemnation. They departed, and so He tells them to depart. Now they willingly absent themselves from the Lord, but then they will not want to depart from Him. God will gather up the nations to thresh them, but they gather themselves to Him (Mic. 4:11,12).

To the perpetual fire which is prepared for the Devil and his messengers– Clearly alluding to the Gehenna myth. This is a phrase taken straight from Jewish apocalyptic thinking and literature. It was the worst category of punishment conceivable in Judaism. And yet Jesus in the context is talking of the way that religious people who claim to believe in Him will not go unpunished for ignoring the needs of their poor brethren. This all too easy to commit sin... The Lord uses Judaism's toughest language to condemn. But this doesn't mean that He actually believed in the literal existence of either "eternal fire" nor a personal Devil. The Devil's angels are those who ignore their needy brethren. It's a powerful and telling juxtapositioning of ideas by the Lord Jesus. The warning that the wicked will be cast into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil (Mt. 25:41) was referring to the apocryphal fate of supposedly 'wicked angels' as recorded in 1 Enoch 54. The references to Tartarus and sinful angels in 2 Peter and Jude are also clear references to wrong beliefs which were common in Jewish apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphical writings. These wrong ideas- and they *are* wrong- are not corrected directly, but rather a moral lesson is drawn from the stories. This is the point of the allusion to them; but there is no explicit correction of these myths in the first instance. It is the Angels of Jesus, and not of the Devil, who punish the wicked (Mt. 13:42–50). A wresting of Scripture to make out that the Devil is the tormentor of the wicked simply runs in straight contradiction to these plain statements of the Lord Jesus.

It is a common theme that the wicked snare themselves, falling into their own pit, rather than God specifically snaring them (e.g. Ps. 7:15; 9:15; 57:6; Prov. 26:27; 28:10; Ecc. 10:8). Their condemnation, the nature of their punishment, will have been specifically "prepared" for them (Mt. 25:41). The bitter self-hatred and ineffable regret of the rejected will be their punishment; and in accordance with the specific, personal way they mistreated and neglected God's Truth in this life, so they will mentally torture themselves. From their own mouth and words men will be judged (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 19:22 cp. 2 Sam. 1:16).

25:44 *Then they shall also answer, saying: Lord*- The figures of judgment can be taken literally to an extent. However, the actual process will be slightly different for each of us. Thus for some, Christ gives his verdict immediately and then discusses it with them (Mt. 25:33,34,41). Others

are apparently given the reasons for the verdict first, and then explicitly told the verdict (Mt. 25:27). Others tell the Lord of their spirituality and are then told his comment (Mt. 25:20). Others don't realize the spiritual growth they've achieved (Mt. 25:37), others see it quite clearly (Lk. 19:16). To some, Jesus speaks first; in other cases, the believer starts the dialogue (Mt. 25:41-44 cp. 11,12,24-26). Some sense their rejection coming and plead to be let in to the Kingdom (Mt. 25:11,12); others complain at their Lord's apparent unfairness, as if they're sorry, but they just have to make their point to him (Mt. 25:44).

The Lord points out their failings, then they give an explanation of their behaviour (Mt. 25:24), justifying themselves (Mt. 25:44). There is an intended contrast in the attitude of the rejected within the Lord's parables of judgment in Mt. 25; they begin by denying the Lord's criticism of their spiritual barrenness, and later in the conversation claim that He is being unreasonable, looking for fruit which He can't reasonably expect. Their tone changes from a loving 'Lord, Lord...' to a more bitter, critical spirit (Mt. 25: 44 cp. 25). According to the type of Cain, he was questioned by God, answered back, and then changed his tune and begged for mercy (Gen. 4:9). Adam likewise began by answering back, blaming the woman and the fact God gave her to him (Gen. 3:12). So they go through three mood swings: 'Lord, Lord', assuring Him they have never omitted to serve Him (Mt. 25:44), then a more bitter feeling that He is unreasonable (Mt. 25:25), and now a desperate begging for mercy.

When did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you?- This is the word commonly used about people ministering to Jesus, and the ministering women at the cross. Again the point is established that the language used about ministrations to the historical Jesus is applied to ministration to the least of His brethren. The shock of both sheep and goats reflects their shock at the degree to which their brethren really had been the very same as the Lord Jesus. The parable suggests that we shall never in this life appreciate the degree to which He perceives His brethren as Himself, and our actions to them are our actions to Him. Any exclusion or spitefulness towards them is directly felt as action against Him. The thought of not ministering unto the crucified Christ is unthinkable, and is so clearly expressed by the goats in their denial of having been guilty of this. And yet to ignore our brethren who are part of Christ, who are Him to us, is to do the same. We wish to minister to the Lord in His time of need. But He is not here personally. And yet effectively He is, insofar as His brethren are His body, and are right before our eyes.

25:45 *Then he shall answer them, saying: Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of these least, you did not do it to me*- See on :40 *The least*.

Many of those who ungraciously storm out of fellowship with the rest of the body, do so because they complain that other believers are weak, unloving, hypocrites, don't practice what they preach etc. And in many ways, their complaints are true (seeing that the Lord came to heal those who need a doctor rather than shake hands with the healthy). And again, Paul has a comment on this situation. He says that those parts of our bodies "that seem to be weaker... that we think are less honourable... the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty... with special honour" (NIV). The private parts of our bodies are the parts we are most sensitive to, although on the outside they seem weak and hidden. And so Paul reasons that the weaker parts of the ecclesial body should be treated the same. The Greek for "feeble" (1 Cor. 12:21) is used (notably in Corinthians) to describe spiritual weakness: Mk. 14:38; Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 8:7,10; 9:22; 11:30; 1 Thess. 5:14. And in some ways, we are all "weak" (1 Cor. 1:27; 4:10). So those we perceive ("that seem to be... that we think") to be spiritually weak in their external appearance, we should be especially sensitive towards. Significantly, the "sick" (s.w. "feeble") in the parable of Mt. 25:44 are the "least" of Christ's brethren, the spiritually weakest; and at the day of judgment, the rejected are condemned because of their attitude towards these spiritually weakest of Christ's brethren. As John realized the tendency of some to think they could love God without loving His Sons, so Paul tackled the same problem at Corinth. He reasons that "the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee... if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if they were all one member, where were the body?" (1 Cor. 12:21). He knew that some would want to go off on their own, and he shows that such behaviour would suggest that they alone were the whole body. He knew that some would think that they had no need of other parts of the ecclesial body; he saw that some would feel that they were so inferior to others that they had no place in the body. All these are reasons why believers push off on their own. But notice that Paul doesn't actually say 'the eye *shouldn't* say to the hand, I have no need of thee'; but rather "the eye *cannot* say to the hand...". Although some may say or feel this, ultimately, from God's perspective, it's simply not valid. Christian disillusion with Christianity mustn't lead us to quit the body. The same logic applies to those who think that the body of Christ is divided; ultimately, there is one body, and from God's perspective this is indivisible. The divisions only exist in the minds of men. Those who say that they don't need fellowship with their brethren "cannot say" this, according to Paul. If they continue on this road, ultimately they declare themselves not of the one body of Christ; although I trust there are many brethren who have done just this who may still receive God's gracious salvation.

"Of these" suggests that the righteous are present and visible at the time of the verdict given to the goats. Again we see the public dimension to the judgment process.

A telling chronology is suggested by putting together a few Scriptures. The foolish virgins will knock on the door, as it were, and be told by the Lord "I know you not" (Mt. 25:12). Lk. 13:27 says that He tells the rejected *after* they have justified themselves to Him: "I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity". Mt. 7:22,23 describes a dialogue in which the rejected justify themselves by listing their good works, and the Lord will profess unto them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity". All their good works He will see as works of sin, because they were not of faith. Mt. 25:41-45 gives more information: the rejected are told "Depart from me", but they argue back with self-justification, and then they are told that they had not shown love to the least of Christ's brethren, and are sent away to punishment.

25:46 *And these shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into eternal life*- After the pattern of Cain and Adam (Gen. 3:24; 4:14), and also the idea of the wicked being *cast* into the darkness of condemnation, it seems that the rejected will be forcibly driven away. Cain was driven out from the faces, the presence of the land of Eden, where the Lord's presence was (Gen. 4:14). Presumably this driving out was done by the Angels. We are left to imagine the ultimate tragedy of Cain going forth from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16 s.w. "face" 4:14), and the rejected 'going away into...' (Mt. 25:46). The tragedy of rejection is well reflected in the way the Lord speaks of how "great was the fall" of the poorly built house (Mt. 7:27). We are invited to see worthy and unworthy walking away from the throne *into* different futures. The sheep will enter *into* the city (Rev. 22:14), *into* the temple (Rev. 15:8), *into* their rest (Heb. 4:11), *into* the Kingdom (Acts 14:22; Jn. 3:5; Lk. 18:24; Mt. 18:3); *into* life (Mk. 9:45; Mt. 18:9; 19:17); *into* the joy of Christ (Mt. 25:23).

The rejected going away into... (Mt. 25:46) is only a reflection of the position they themselves adopted in their lives. They thought that they could flee away from the judgments of God (Rom. 2:3 Gk.)- and so they will flee from His judgment seat, although so, so unwillingly. The man who refuses to immediately respond to the Lord's call to service says that he must first *go away* from the Lord and bury his father (Mt. 8:21); the young man *went away* in sorrow (Mt. 19:22); people hear the Gospel and then *go away* to all their petty businesses of this life (Mt. 22:5). Those who couldn't handle the demanding Lord *went away* from Him (Jn. 6:66); and Judas *went away* of himself to hang himself (Mt. 27:5). He condemned himself. These are all the same words as in Mt. 25:46- those who of their own choice went away from the Lord now, although that isn't maybe how they saw it, will then go away from Him into condemnation. This point is made even within Mt. 25. The foolish virgins *went away* to buy oil- they didn't want to immediately go to their Lord (:10); the one talent man *went away* and buried his talent (:18,25). And then at

judgment day they again *go away from* the Lord (:46). Their going away from the Lord is simply being confirmed by Him.

CHAPTER 26

26:1 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these words, he said to his disciples*- The same rubric as in 19:1, suggesting that this was a way of dividing up the material to assist in memorization. The earliest converts would have memorized the good news preached to them by e.g. Matthew, and then the material was written up under inspiration as 'the Gospel of Matthew' which we now have.

26:2 *You know*- The knowledge can refer to both the subsequent clauses in the sentence. The Lord said that they knew that Passover was coming, and that He must be handed over to crucifixion. Yet the disciples did not 'know' of His crucifixion in that clearly they had shut their minds to it. And the Lord knew that. But He is still trying to get them to understand. His effort in teaching the disciples is admirable; we would likely have sought to focus solely upon personally getting through with the trauma of death over the next few days. But He perceived that His perfection involved love for His chosen to the end.

That after two days the Passover comes, and the Son of Man will be- A present tense, when we expect a future. The essence of the Lord's function as the Paschal lamb was lived out throughout His life. Perhaps the Lord used this unusual tense because He wanted to prepare the disciples for the fact they were going to keep the Passover a day earlier than usual; but they need not worry about that, because the essence of Passover was ongoing in the Lord's life. John the Baptist had perceived that when commenting that the Lord was "the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29,36) even when it wasn't Passover time. See on :28 *Is shed* and on :30 *They went out*. Luke says "the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover". "Called the Passover" might suggest that it was only called Passover, but was not so in reality. This would connect with the theme of the feast being called a "feast of the Jews" rather than of Yahweh, and the temple becoming "your house" rather than God's.

Delivered up to be crucified- Literally, 'is being betrayed'. The next verse shows what was going on in justification of this statement. The Lord could have known of it through direct Divine revelation, but I prefer to think that His sensitivity was such that He perceived it of His own perception. The Greek can mean to be handed over, and also to be betrayed, with reference to Judas. The obvious double meaning indicates that the Lord did purposefully use words and ideas with more than one meaning, realizing that after His death, the other meaning would be made apparent. This means that we are quite justified in perceiving multiple meanings and intentions in inspired words, the Olivet Prophecy being a classic example, with its various possible applications. "Is betrayed"

reflects a present tense in the Greek. The Lord's handing over to death, indeed His death itself, was in essence lived out throughout His life. His life was a form of ongoing death.

26:3 *Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered at the court of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas*- The record may wish to give the impression that it was because of the Lord's prediction of His death that the Jews assembled and arranged it. He certainly planned His death consciously, and the Jews responded to His provocations. The gathering or assembling together of the Lord's enemies is a major theme (:57; 27:17,27,62; 28:12); and uses the same word for the gathering together of the rejected to condemnation at the last day. Coming before Christ in His time of dying was and is a foretaste of the last judgment. The Lord Jesus causes people to gather together either for or against Him. This is the fundamental divide- not between brother and brother, but between the believer and the world, light and darkness.

The word translated "court" or "palace" is used 12 times in the New Testament, and eight of them refer to the court of the High Priest. It's tempting, therefore, to think that the Lord may well have had this same court / palace in mind when He spoke of how an armed strong man "keeps his palace" [s.w., Lk. 11:21], but the Lord Jesus through His death on the cross would overpower him, and take his goods and share them with His people. The strong man who kept the palace may have had some reference, therefore, to the Jewish High Priest; the good things of the temple were inaccessible to God's people, until the Lord overpowered that entire system. The Lord also spoke of how He has a "fold", the same word translated "palace" or "court", into which He must gather His sheep (Jn. 10:1,16). He had to take over the whole temple system, and replace the Jewish religious leadership with His own bad of secular men, prostitutes and hangers on.

26:4 *And they plotted together how they might seize Jesus using trickery and kill him*- The Greek specifically means to jointly decide. The collective guilt of Jewry is being emphasized, because their judgment was likewise collective. The same word is used four times later in this chapter about the 'taking hold' of the Lord Jesus in Gethsemane (:48,50,55,57). This 'laying on of hands' against the Lord is likewise strongly noted by Mark (s.w. Mk. 14:44,46,49,51). The sight of it was burnt into their memories. There are likewise parts and aspects of the Lord's sufferings, and words associated with them, which are likewise burnt in the consciousness of all those who truly love Him.

"Trickery" is as AV "*By subtilty*"- an allusion to the Lord's Jewish opposition as the seed of the serpent at whose hands the seed of the woman was wounded (Gen. 3:15). But the word literally refers to a bait, implying some plan to deceive Him into a position in which they could

arrest Him. But what were these plans? The Lord fell for no bait. Perhaps the idea was that Judas would come and kiss Him, and lead Him into some isolated ambush or compromising situation. When the Lord made it clear to Judas that He knew what Judas was up to, the plan fell apart and the soldiers simply grabbed the Lord. And they ended killing Him "on the feast day", which was exactly what they had planned to avoid (:5).

The plan made ahead of time to kill Him was clearly typified by the brothers' plans to kill Joseph.

26:5 *But they said: Not during the feast*- But they did crucify the Lord during the feast, at the same time as the Passover lambs were being killed. Their plan went wrong- see on :4 *By subtilty*. Try as they might to not kill Him then, the Lord wanted to die as the Passover lamb, and this happened despite the Jews *not* wanting that. The Lord had control over the time of His death, because He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

Lest a riot arise among the people- This indicates the popularity the Lord enjoyed even at that stage, and the fact He was crucified with the general goodwill of the masses is therefore an essay in the fickleness of human nature. And yet the careful plans of the leaders didn't work out- there was "a tumult" about it, the same Greek word translated "uproar" (27:24), and likewise they did end up killing Jesus "on the feast day" when it was not their intention to.

26:6 *Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper*- The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that here in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded here in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto

Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14 speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

26:7 *A woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it*- The Greek *bar-utimos* uses a term, *utimos*, elsewhere used about the precious, costly blood of Christ. Matthew uses it about the "price" of the Lord's blood (27:6,9), as does Paul (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23) and Peter (1 Pet. 2:7). The point is simple. The Lord's blood shed for us was and is the most valuable thing in existence, in the entire cosmos; and we should feel that when we take the cup which symbolizes it. And our response is to give our most valuable things, materially and otherwise, for Him.

On his head as he reclined at table- The woman anointed the Lord's head in order to reflect her belief that He really was the Christ, the anointed one. She gave her life savings for this belief. It can be apparently painless to believe that Jesus is Christ, and yet the implications of accepting this simple fact can transform a life. What she did was surely rooted in her understanding of Song 1:12, where Solomon's lover has spikenard (s.w. LXX Jn. 12:3) which sends forth its smell "While the king sitteth at his table". Clearly enough she saw Jesus right there and then as the King- even though His Kingdom was not of that world. Her love for Him, her reflection upon the Old Testament, and her perception of Him as her future Lord and King to the extent that she even then treated Him as such, so certain was her faith in His future victory and worthiness… this all motivated her to give the quintessence of her life's work for Him. And it should for us too.

26:8 *But when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying*- Mk. 14:4 adds that the indignation was within themselves, and so the words they are here recorded as saying were likely within themselves. We wonder how many other times when we read of people 'saying' something, the 'saying' was within their own minds. For self-talk is understood by the Lord as our actual words. Whether or not we hold our tongues back is not the ultimate issue. The words have been said within us. See on 26:10 *When Jesus understood*. If the reconstruction of events I offered in commentary on :8, we can better understand their frustration. They would have seen an identical 'waste' of wealth in the anointing of four days previously in the same village, perhaps in the same home; and they had seen it in Galilee at the incident recorded in Luke 7. And they were doing their math and calculating the total cost 'wasted'.

To what purpose?- The Greek *eis tis* could equally mean 'For whom?', the implication being that the poor could have been benefitted far more than the Lord Jesus. Hence the Lord replies that the purpose of the anointing was to embalm Him ahead of time for burial. Just as the woman was inspired by the generous anointing of Mary four days previously and the Galilean prostitute of Luke 7, so the huge amount of spices purchased by Nicodemus in Jn. 19:39 was likely motivated in turn by her example. Critics claim that the amount of spices ("one hundred pound weight") bought was more than used in the burial of the Caesars. The woman here used a pound of spikenard, worth more than the 300 pence at which Mary's anointing liquid was valued. And in turn, Nicodemus was motivated yet more- 100 times more. She gave one pound, he gave 100 pounds' weight. This is the reason for the deja vu of our lives, of how experiences repeat between human lives- it's so that we may be inspired to greater service than even those who went before.

Is this waste- This is the same Greek word used nearly 20 times in the NT for destruction and condemnation; it is the same word used in describing

Judas as "the son of *perdition*". The tragedy of condemnation is the waste of what could have been. This is the sadness with which God sees condemnation. We note that four days before, it had been Judas who complained about the 'waste'. His attitude had spread to the disciples. But the paradox was that he was thereby the son of waste, he was condemning himself by complaining about the waste of devotion towards the Lord Jesus. The idea could even be that they were so angry that they thought that the woman was condemning herself by what she had done, because she could have given the money to the poor. This is seen so often in religious experience- those who stand on the sidelines become so bitter at how others actively express their devotions to their Lord that they go so far as to condemn them. We think of how Michal despised David for dancing before the Lord, and was punished with barrenness; and of the Lord's observation: "Is your eye evil, because I am good / generous?" (20:15). The world's wealthiest individuals are often very generous to charitable causes- and yet they do so to a chorus of criticism from those who have given little or nothing to such causes.

26:9 *For this might have been sold for much and given to the poor*- The very words used by the Lord to the rich ruler, telling him to sell what he had and give to the poor (19:21). Their idea in saying this may have been to accuse the woman of disobedience to the Lord's teachings. We see here how deep are the feelings aroused by spiritual jealousy. This woman had made a stellar commitment to her Lord; and quite unspoken, her devotion challenged the other disciples. And so by all means they had to condemn her, and were happy to misquote the Lord's words to achieve that. This is one simple reason why those most active and sacrificial in church life are often the most viciously attacked by their fellow disciples.

26:10 *But Jesus perceiving it, said to them: Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a*- This translation is misleading; the idea of the Greek is that the Lord perceived the situation immediately. But the fact He perceived it confirms the suggestion that the words the disciples apparently spoke were in fact spoken within their minds and not out loud- see on 26:8 *Indignation, saying*.

Good work- The Greek has the idea of beauty. The same Greek phrase rendered "a good work" is found in 1 Tim. 5:10 as something required of a mature spiritual woman, and for which she must be "reported"- clearly alluding to how this woman's "good work" was to be told / reported worldwide. She thus became a model for other sisters to follow, in the same way as she herself had copied the examples of Mary four days previously, and the sinful woman of Luke 7. This is the intended power and purpose of good works- they serve as inspiration for others to likewise glorify the Lord. The Greek expression 'to work a [good] work' is used elsewhere regarding the Lord's working of miracles (Jn. 6:28; 9:41;

10:33). Her response was no less significant than the working of a miracle.

Upon me- The Greek *eis eme* could as well mean 'in Me', as if the woman's work gave the Lord huge encouragement within Himself.

26:11 *For you always have the poor with you*- Christ's love for us, His Father's spiritual house, was typified by His being likened to the poor slave under the Law who perpetually dedicated himself to serve his master's house. An extension of this idea is revealed by a connection between the Lord saying "Ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mt. 26:11) and Dt. 15:11 "For the poor shall never cease out of the land". Thus Jesus is associating himself with the "poor man... of thy brethren" of Dt. 15:7. Note how Jesus calls himself a "poor man", especially on the cross: Ps. 34:6; 35:10; 37:14; 40:17; 69:29,33; 70:5; 86:1; 109:22; 113:7 cp. 2 Cor. 8:9- an impressive list. Christ exercised the rights of the poor to glean in the cornfield on the Sabbath (Lk. 6:1); Dt. 15:7 warned the Israelites not to be hard hearted and refuse help to such a poor brother. Christ is alluding to this passage by saying that the disciples should not be hard hearted by stopping Mary give her rich ointment to Him, the poor. The following Dt. 15:12-17 is also concerning Jesus. Thus Jesus was spiritually poor and hungry, and was so grateful for Mary's encouragement.

Note that the Law also taught that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poverty. And yet the same Law tacitly recognized the reality of human weakness in noting that "the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Dt. 15:11). God's law therefore also reflects His grace and understanding of human failure to be fully obedient.

But you will not always have me with you- We would likely have been tempted to expose the root of the immediate problem- Judas was a thief, and wanted the cash because he would keep some of it and only distribute part to the poor. But the Lord as ever, was wiser than to confront issues in such a primitive way. He brushes past the complaint that this woman had ignored His principle of selling what we have and giving to the poor, and doesn't expose the core reason for Judas' trouble stirring about the issue. Rather He focuses upon what the woman *had* achieved, and bids the disciples look closer at His death and how they should be responding to it.

"Always" *is* literally, 'at all times'. There would always be opportunity, times of opportunity, to do good to the poor.

26:12 *For in that she poured this ointment upon my body*- A different word from that used to describe how she poured the ointment on His head (:7). Perhaps her focus was upon anointing Him- but because the ointment dripped from His head onto His body, the Lord imputed to her

an understanding of His upcoming death and saw it as an embalming of Him, in line with the oft repeated idea that His life was in effect His death; as He sat at the meal table, it was as if He were already dead.

She did it to prepare me for burial- The RV has "to prepare me for burial". This could be read as the Lord saying that what she did inspired Him to go forward in the path to death which He was treading. The Greek means specifically embalming. It was as if the woman perceived that the Lord was effectively the slain lamb of God even whilst He was alive. It is used only once more in the New Testament, describing the embalming of the Lord's body (Jn. 19:40).

26:13 *Truly I say to you: Wherever in the whole world this gospel is preached, what this woman has done shall also be spoken of*- Her generosity was set up as a cameo of the response to the Lord which all who believe the Gospel should make. The Gospel is not just a set of doctrines to be painlessly apprehended. It is a call to action after the pattern of this woman. The good news was to be of the Lord's death and burial, and yet integral to that message was to be the pattern of response which was seen in her- to give our all, our most treasured and hoarded things, for His sake.

There is evident connection with the Lord's prophecy of how the Gospel would be preached in all the world (Mt. 24:14; Mk. 16:15). He seems to have seen the 'Gospel' that would be preached as a re-telling of His life and incidents in it, such as the woman's anointing of Him. It is significant that her anointing is mentioned in all four Gospel records. In Mk. 14:9 we read that wherever the gospel was to be preached, what she had done would be narrated in memory of her. So 'preaching the Gospel' is defined there as a narration of the events and sayings of the Lord Jesus in His ministry. The Gospel records are transcripts of the Gospel preached by e.g. Matthew. The Gospel is therefore in the Gospels. The rest is interpretation and theology, necessary and helpful, but there is no avoiding the fact that the Gospel itself is in the records of the Gospel which we have in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Lord foresaw that transcripts of His work and words would indeed be made, and He envisaged how the supreme devotion of this anonymous woman would be part of that message. The language is very similar to that of 24:14: "This Gospel... shall be preached [*kerusso* again] in all the world... and then shall the end come". Matthew may have had in view how his version of the Gospel needed to be spread into all the world.

As a memorial of her- The language of 'memorial' is typically used in contemporary literature about memorials to the gallant deeds of *men*. But the Lord was challenging such thinking by saying that the Gospel would include a memorial of an anonymous *woman*. And her humanly senseless pouring out of her wealth in a ten minute act of devotion to Him was none

less than the bravest or noblest act of any man.

26:14 *Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests*- In all the Gospel records, the decision of Judas to betray the Lord follows on from the anointing incidents. The [apparent] waste of money in senseless devotion obviously irked Judas. People who are obsessed with money as he was often find such things unbearable to be part of. Judas is repeatedly called "Simon's son" at this time. And the anointing took place in Simon's house (:6). It could well be that Judas was a member of the family, possibly even a brother of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. To see the family wealth 'wasted' in this way was unbearable for him. The reasons for his betrayal were surely multi-factorial, but attitudes to money played a large part. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him...?" clearly suggests a financial motive; and the records seem to give the impression that the apparent waste of money, especially if it was money he thought might be coming to him in the inheritance, was the final straw for him. After that, he went to the Jews and opened discussions about betraying the Lord. The way he threw the thirty pieces of silver down on the ground reflects his final realization of how foolish he had been. And yet the lesson is so often never learnt; men and women effectively betray their Lord for money; accumulation of wealth, development of career, take precedence over devotion to Him, and finally lead to betrayal.

26:15 *And said: What are you willing to give me*- The financial aspect was important to Judas. He, like so many after him, was prepared to betray the Son of God purely for money. The decision of Judas to make this offer is recorded as coming straight after the record of the woman anointing the Lord's feet with the expensive ointment. Judas's heart cried out as he saw all that money wasted; he knew that the perfume could have been sold for much and the money entrusted to him as the treasurer, and therefore he would have had the opportunity to take some for himself. As I read the records, the motivation of Judas was *fundamentally* financial, whatever we may like to speculate about his other reasons. It's almost too farfetched to believe; that a man who walked in the company of the Son of God, who entered into deep spiritual conversation with him, who is even described by the Spirit of Christ as "a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance" (Ps. 55:13,4), could steal the odd few dollars (in our terms) out of the bag of those 12 travelling men. It couldn't have been any great sum that he notched up in those three years. And yet this led Judas to betray the Lord of all grace, for a sum no more than at most a few thousand US dollars (in our terms). They valued the Son of God at 30 pieces of silver (Mt. 27:9)- and *all it could buy was a field*. And Judas was happy with that. The way he later hurled those coins down and stalked off to hang himself suggests that he saw the essence of his failure as being tied up with that money. "The reward of iniquity" was what Peter contemptuously called it (Acts 1:18).

If I will deliver Him to you?- The Lord had predicted this, using the very same words, concerning how He would be delivered over to the "chief priests" (20:18). The Lord had only just used the word translated "deliver" in predicting His betrayal (:2). And Judas did it. The Lord surely knew the power of self-fulfilling prophecies; to some degree He psychologically set up this situation so that this would indeed happen. For ultimately the Lord 'gave Himself', He handed Himself over [the same Greek word] for us (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25; 1 Pet. 2:23). It is not at all unbelievable that Judas would do the very thing which the Lord had predicted the betrayer would do. It is true to human experience; people do the very thing they know they should not, performing to the letter the very situations which they have been clearly warned about. Yet through all this, it must be remembered that the same word for deliver up / betray is used about how *God* 'delivered up' His Son for us all (Rom. 8:32). Although Judas was without question guilty and did what he did of his own volition, God's hand was somehow in it, working through the freewill of men. And this is the great comfort to all those who suffer evil at the hands of evil men; the evil of the men and their actions doesn't mean that we have been forsaken by God, nor that His far higher hand is not in it all, working as He does for our ultimate good in the latter end.

We noted earlier that the very language of betrayal into the hands of the religious leaders and thence to the power of the Gentiles (20:18,19) was used about the experience of the faithful in the final tribulation (24:9,10). In the very last few days, the last generation will pass through the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, identifying with His death so that they might live with Him. This will be especially appropriate if the last generation are the only human beings to never taste of death. And even for those believers who do not live at that time, they too find that their experiences of betrayal are a part in their fellowship of their Lord's sufferings. For the same word is used in speaking of how we are all "delivered unto death for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:11). For the sake of being in Him, identified with Him, we must all share in His sufferings and betrayal experience.

They paid him- They weighed [Gk.] the money, fulfilling Zech. 11:12 "They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver". The legalism of all concerned shines through. According to Mark 14:11, this was really an advance payment. The money was perhaps weighed out because the shekels were the temple shekels, those used in the temple.

Thirty pieces- The legal price of a slave (Ex. 21:32). The money intended for purchasing the temple sacrifices (see on *They covenanted*) was used to buy the Lord at the time when He appeared supremely "in the form of a servant".

Of silver- They were "the price of [Christ's] blood" (27:6), "the price of [Christ]". We are surely intended to use this identification to interpret the

parable of the pieces of silver [s.w.] given to the Lord's servants (25:18,27). He calls it "My money" [s.w. "silver pieces", Lk. 19:23]. The money of Christ was the money paid to get His blood. Perhaps those to whom more silver pieces were given are those who had sinned the more, whose redemption was the more costly; or those who appreciate the price of their redemption the more.

26:16 *And from that time onward he sought opportunity to betray him*- One with the Lord's sensitivity would easily have realized what was happening. Yet He was so far above it all; for He was going to hand Himself over, and not be handed over by anyone.

26:17 *Now on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying: Where do you want us to*- This is noted so often, as if the Lord was alone, presumably in prayer to the Father, and wasn't with the disciples all the time.

Prepare the Passover for you to eat?- Lk. 22:8 adds the detail that actually this was said in response to Peter and John being told to go and prepare the Passover. Mk. 14:15 brings out the paradox that the Lord directed them to an upper room that was already "prepared" (s.w.), and there they prepared the Passover. The Lord had taught that the festal meal was already prepared for His people (22:4 s.w.). The Lord was surely using the language of Passover preparation in saying that He was going [to the cross] to prepare a place for us (Jn. 14:1-3)- and He said that at the very time Passover was being prepared. His request that *they* prepare Passover was therefore asking for a mutuality in response from them.

26:18 *And he said: Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him*- Mark and Luke add that he was a man bearing a pitcher of water (Mk. 14:13; Lk. 22:10). This water was carried upstairs into the upper room, and became, as it were, the wine of the new covenant. Carrying water was woman's work, and the Lord surely arranged this special sign in order to show how at His table, there was gender equality. He was so far ahead of His time. The vague "such a man" is perhaps to conceal the identity of the householder, given that the Gospels were distributed at a time of persecution. Or perhaps it was in order to avoid the identifying of the house and turning it into some kind of shrine, or special honour being given to the householder.

The Teacher said- The anonymous man, unnamed perhaps for security reasons, was presumably a believer for this title to mean anything to the man. Likewise the reference to the Lord's time being at hand would've only been understandable by a disciple. The Lord wishes to assume that the man will appreciate that if the Lord's time of death was at hand, then He must first keep the Passover.

My time is at hand- The Lord used similar language in teaching how in the very last days of the tribulation, we will likewise know that the Lord's time is at hand (24:32,33). This is another one of many suggestions that we who live in the last days will go through the essence of the Lord's sufferings.

I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples- The use of *meta* carries the sense of amongst, in the midst of, and not simply 'together with'. Heb. 2:12 perhaps alludes to this by quoting and applying to Jesus the Old Testament passage which says "I will declare Your Name unto My brothers, in the midst of the church will I sing praise". This is quoted in the context of a sustained argument in Hebrews 2 that the Lord shared our nature. His breaking of bread with the disciples therefore was an essay in His humanity and solidarity with us- and that is the intention of the breaking of bread meeting to this day. The intended meaning is so much enhanced by correctly appreciating how the Lord shared our nature.

26:19 *And the disciples did as Jesus directed them, and they prepared the Passover*- The same rubric is used about Moses' obedience to all commanded him. Those secular men were being painted in terms of Moses, who was seen as without equal in Judaism. But the Lord often paints His secular followers in the very terms of the most stellar Old Testament heroes of Judaism.

26:20 *Now when evening had come, he was dining with the twelve disciples*- "Dining" is "reclined". Joachim Jeremias gives a whole string of quotes from Rabbinic and historical writings that indicate that "At the time of Jesus the diners sat down" to eat. Yet the Gospel records are insistent that Jesus and the disciples *reclined* at the last supper (Mt. 26:20; Mk. 14:18; Lk. 22:14; Jn. 13:12,23,25,28). Yet at the Passover, it was apparently common to recline, because as Rabbi Levi commented "slaves eat standing, but here at the Passover meal people should recline to eat, to signify that they have passed from slavery to freedom". The breaking of bread is thus stressed in the records as being a symbol of our freedom from slavery. It should not in that sense be a worrying experience, taking us on a guilt trip. It is to celebrate the salvation and release from bondage which has truly been achieved for us in Christ our Passover.

"With the twelve" doesn't mean that only the twelve partook or were present. Matthew's record may simply be focusing upon them. There are reasons to think that there were others present too.

26:21 *And as they were eating, he said: Truly I say to you: One of you shall betray me*- The Lord had repeatedly predicted that He would be 'betrayed' or 'handed over'. But He had not defined who would do it, indeed the form in which He had spoken of being 'handed over' was vague and didn't necessarily require that one individual would do it. We

must remember that *paradidomi* means literally 'to hand over' and doesn't carry the sense of personal betrayal which the English word 'betray' is loaded with. They were there shocked when He stated that "one of *you*" would do this.

26:22 *And they were exceedingly sorrowful*- It is commendable that their dominant emotion was of sorrow rather than anger. We perhaps would have expected anger more than sorrow. But their sorrow is a reflection of the degree of their love for the Lord, and their sorrow for the person who would face the awful consequences of doing so.

And all began- The idea is that they all burst out with the same question at the same time. And yet Mk. 14:19 records that they asked this "One by one". The scene is imaginable- after initially all bursting out with the same question, they try to ask Him the same question personally in order to get an answer. Which is why Judas asks the question somewhat later (:25). Again it is commendable that their very first reaction was to wonder whether they personally could be the betrayer- rather than 'Lord, is it *him*?'. But after realizing that it was not them personally, naturally they began to look at one another, wondering whom He was speaking of (Jn. 13:22). Although "doubting of whom He spoke" (Jn. 13:22) really means they were at a loss to know. Clearly they had absolutely no suspicion that it was Judas. And when Judas is told "What you are doing, do quickly" and Judas exits (Jn. 13:27-29), they still assume that he must have been sent out to minister to the poor [suggesting there were beggars around the feast, again hinting that the last supper was not held behind closed doors]. This again speaks to us who replicate the last supper week by week. Some will indeed betray their Lord, but we have absolutely no idea who they are.

To say to him: Is it I, Lord?- The negative implies the answer 'No, you are not the one'. It was more than a question- it was a declaration of innocence. This is the basis for self-examination at the Lord's table; we should be able to do it and conclude that we are not the Lord's betrayer. Some who sit at that table will betray Him, and we are to realize the very real possibility of our own ultimate failure, the eternity of the future we may miss. Perhaps "every one of them" excludes Judas, because he apparently asked the question later (:25), and replaces 'Lord' with "Master"[Gk. 'rabbi'] when he asks: "Master ['rabbi'], is it I?" (:25). His usage of 'rabbi' to address the Lord may reflect how influenced he was by Judaism, and how he failed to appreciate the utter Lordship of Jesus. Judas maybe persuaded himself that this Jesus was just another itinerant rabbi, who Judaism would be better off without. Note that "Is it I?" is *eimi ego*, literally 'Am I?'. This is one of many examples of where *ego eimi* means simply 'I am', and [contrary to Trinitarian claims] the words do not mean that the speaker of them is claiming to be God.

26:23 *And he answered and said: He that dipped his hand with me in the dish*- The past tense is important, for if the Lord was predicting a future event, then all the disciples would be looking carefully at the dish. "Dipped", *em-bapto*, carries the suggestion that there was liquid or water within the dish. Lamb is greasy, and there would have been dishes of water on the table in which the diners dipped their hands. The Lord had done that at the same time as Judas, and must have pressed His fingers against those of Judas. But none of the others had noticed. Jn. 13:26 says that "It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it"- perhaps meaning that the Lord had put a crumb of bread into Judas' fingers whilst their hands touched in the bowl. Any other reading of the incident faces the obvious difficulty that if indeed the Lord publicly pointed Judas out as the betrayer, there would have been no confusion as to why he went out into the darkness. And we would expect to read of an outcry amongst the 11 against Judas; but the record instead stresses that they totally didn't suspect Judas until he was out of the room. Mk. 14:20 adds that the Lord said that the man was "One of the twelve" who had dipped his hand with the Lord in the dish. This suggests there were others apart from the twelve eating at the table and dipping their hands in the dish. It was not therefore a closed communion. There would have been no need for such a "large" room (Lk. 22:12) if only the twelve were present.

The same shall betray me- The Greek word translated "betray" really means 'to hand over'. This was yet future for Judas. The 'betrayal' in the English sense of that word had already happened.

26:24 *The Son of Man goes*- The Lord's 'going' was His going to the cross. The Lord used the same word in 13:44 in describing Himself as the man who 'goes' *with joy* and sells all that He has in order to buy / redeem [s.w.] the field (representing the world) in order to gain for Himself the treasure (the redeemed). His 'going' to the cross was therefore done with some form of "joy". Even when the only visible representative of the treasure were that band of mixed up men and a few doubtful women. He uses the word again in telling Peter to 'go' behind Him and carry His cross (16:23). Yet the Lord looked beyond the cross; He saw Himself as 'going' to the Father (Jn. 7:33; 8:14,21,22 s.w.), in the same way as we do not only 'go' to our death, but ultimately even death itself is part of an onward journey ultimately towards God and His Kingdom. The Lord's attitude to His death was that He *knew* that He was now 'going to the Father' (Jn. 13:3; 14:28; 16:5,10,16,17 s.w.). This unique perspective upon death and suffering is only logical for those who have a clear conception of future resurrection and personal fellowship with the Father in His future Kingdom.

Even as it is written of Him- Jn. 13:18 is specific: "But the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me". The reference to the heel naturally suggests the Gospel promise of Gen. 3:15.

But it seems the wrong way around- it is the seed of the woman who lifts up a bruised heel with which to crush the seed of the serpent. There is no lack of evidence that on the cross, the Lord identified totally with sinners, to the point that He felt forsaken just as sinners are forsaken. Or perhaps Judas justified his actions by deciding that Jesus was a false Messiah, the seed of the serpent, and the righteous thing to do was to crush the serpent with his heel.

But woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! - The Lord typically pronounced 'Woe' upon the Jewish world and their religious leaders. He classes Judas along with them, because his actions had been inspired by them. The devil, in this context referring to the Jewish opposition to Jesus, had put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas (Jn. 13:2). "Woe" translates *ouai*, an intensified form of *ou*, "no". Perhaps in His word choice the Lord was still desperately saying to Judas 'No! No! Don't do it!'. He knew that He had to be betrayed, but His appeals for Judas to repent were therefore rooted in an understanding that the Bible prophecies would come true in some other way than through Judas. For otherwise, Judas would have had no real possibility of repentance, and no real choice but than to do what he did.

It would have been better if that man had not been born- "Better" shows how the Lord is sympathetically looking at things from the perspective of Judas. For in Jn. 14 He reasons that His departure is good for all concerned. The Lord foresaw Judas' agony at the last day. But the Greek can bear a retranslation: 'It would be virtuous for that man if he did not conceive / gender'. In that case, there would be yet another appeal for Judas to stop dead in his heart the conception of sin. The Lord elsewhere uses words with two [or more] meanings in order to deliver a specific message to an individual, within a statement of general truth which appeared intended for others. The messages He sent back to the imprisoned John the Baptist are a clear example. The Lord's last ditch attempts to save Judas, rather than allow himself to be so hurt by him that He just ignored him, are a powerful encouragement to us in dealing with those who harm us and wilfully do evil.

26:25 *And Judas, who betrayed him, answered and said: Is it I, Rabbi?*- See on :22 *Lord, is it I?* If Judas openly asked the question and was told 'Yes Judas, it's you I'm referring to', then there is no easy explanation for why no reaction from the disciples is recorded, nor any attempt by them to persuade him otherwise or limit his actions. Likewise we must give full weight to the fact that when Judas exits, they assume he has gone to buy something for the feast or to minister to the poor (Jn. 13:27-29). This leads to the conclusion that Judas asked the Lord this quietly and received a hushed reply. John likewise leaned on the Lord's chest and asked Him quietly who it was (Jn. 13:24-26). Is it possible that Judas also at this stage also lay on the Lord's chest, so close to Him that he could whisper

to Him out of earshot of the others? It was a "large upper room", and so it may well have been possible. In this case, Judas was indeed the Lord's "familiar friend in whom I trusted", and the closeness of Judas and Jesus would explain why the disciples were completely not suspicious of Judas. If the Lord had publicly answered Judas, then surely events would not have unfolded as they did. The Lord knew exactly what Judas was planning, more by His premonition and sensitivity to Judas' feelings than by a bolt of Divine revelation. The Lord freely gave His life, it was not taken from Him by betrayal and murder. He therefore set the situation up, on one level, to happen as it did. And He didn't want to stop it happening. And yet on the other hand, He so wished for Judas' repentance on a personal level. And this is how He works with men to this day.

He said to him: You have said it- This is exactly the style the Lord adopts with Pilate in answering the question as to whether He is King of the Jews: "You said it" (Mt. 27:11). He allows people to come to a point where they state the truth out of their own mouths, rather than Him putting words into their mouths. And He works likewise today.

26:26 *As they were eating*- Eating the Passover lamb. The bread and wine were accessories, side dishes, and the Lord takes these things and makes them so significant. He doesn't, e.g., take some lamb and divide it between the guests with the message that "This represents My body". Even though the lamb was the more obvious symbol of Himself than the bread was. He wanted the last supper to be repeated by poor and ordinary people, who had bread but not lamb each week; He used common, readily available bread because that spoke more of His humanity, His ordinariness. He used what was to hand, just as we can for the breaking of bread.

Note that Judas was still present at this point. Jn. 13:18 makes the point concerning him that "He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me". If Judas broke bread with the Lord, this surely indicates that there is nothing intrinsically sinful in breaking bread with sinners. The quotation from Psalm 41 is interesting in the LXX: "the man of my peace, on whom I set my hope". There was special potential in Judas, and the Lord on one hand had hopes for him. It has been argued that the giving of the "sop" to him was the sign of special love and fellowship. Jn. 13:20 goes on to say: "He that receiveth whomsoever I shall send, receiveth me". The 'receiving' in this context is receiving at the Lord's table. To reject others from His table is to reject the Lord.

Jesus took bread- Taking bread, blessing and breaking it and giving to the disciples was exactly what the Lord did at the feeding of the 5000 and 4000 (14:19; 15:36), and we are thereby justified in seeing what He did then as having a religious dimension, practicing thereby an extremely

open table. To 'take bread' can mean [although not always] to actually eat bread. Consider: "The disciples had forgotten to take bread, *neither* did they have with them more than one loaf" (Mk. 8:14)- the force of "neither..." is that they had not eaten bread, rather than that they had forgotten to bring any with them. Philip complained that there would not be enough bread for each of the crowd to 'take' even a little, i.e. to eat just a little (Jn. 6:7). So it could be that the Lord took and ate bread, blessed it, and then asked the disciples to eat it. This sequence of events would then make the eating of bread a more conscious doing of what Jesus had done. He took the bread, and then He asks them to take the bread ("Take, eat"). He is inviting them to mimic Him.

And blessed it- It was usual to bless a meal, especially the Passover lamb, but here the Lord offers a special prayer for the accessory to the meal, the side dish of bread. He wanted to highlight the significance of the most ordinary thing on the table and show that it represented Him.

And he gave it to the disciples, saying: Take, eat- The use of *didomi* is set in the context of all the talk about how the Lord would be *para-didomi*, betrayed / handed / given over to the Jews. The idea is that what happened was ultimately the Lord's choice. He gave Himself, to God and to His people, rather than being given over to death against His will. Lk. 22:29 says that the Lord then used the word *didomi* again: "This is My body, which is given for you". The giving of the bread to them was symbolic of how He would give His body to crucifixion, and how the 'giving over' of Jesus by Judas was not something outside of the Lord's control. It was not a misfortune which changed plans, rather was it precisely in line with the Lord's own giving of His body.

This is my body- See on *Gave it*. He said "This is My body which is given for you" (Lk. 22:29), and also "This is My body which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). He surely said both, repeating the words as the disciples ate the bread. He chose bread and not lamb to represent His body because He wished to emphasize His ordinariness and thereby His presence in the human, daily things of life. To give ones' body is a very intimate statement, almost to the point of being sexual. This is the sober intensity and extent to which the Lord gave Himself for us.

When Jesus said "this is My body" we are to understand that 'this *represents*, this is [a symbol of] my body'. Jesus was clearly referring to what was usually said at the Passover: "This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". It wasn't of course literally the same bread. "This is" clearly means 'this represents' in Zech. 5:3,8; Mt. 13:19-23,38; 1 Cor. 11:25; 12:27. In some Bible versions, when we read the word 'means', it is simply a translation of the verb 'to be' (Mt. 9:13; 12:7; Lk. 15:26; Acts 2:12). 'This is' should be read as 'this means / this represents'. The deftness of the way He broke

that bread apart and held the cup comes out here in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean.

26:27 *And he took a cup*- This was by no means easy for Him, because in Gethsemane He struggled so deeply in order to take it. Surely Matthew was aware of this and wishes us to remember it every time we break bread. He *did* take the cup- the cup we go on to read about, that was so difficult for Him to accept. Luke's record records the taking of the cup twice. This could be a reference to multiple cups of wine drunk at the Passover; or it could be that Luke simply records the incident twice. Or perhaps the Lord was simply drinking from the common table wine, and more than once drew out the symbology.

And gave thanks and gave it to them, saying- Here *eucharisteo* is used, but *eulogeo for* the 'blessing' of the bread. The difference may be in that the Lord took the bread, an accessory to the meal, and turned that which was so ordinary into something of spiritual symbolism; and His blessing of the bread was necessary for this. But *eucharisteo* includes the idea of grace, *charis*, and suggests more thankfulness for grace- a thought appropriate to the meaning of the Lord's blood shed for us by grace. And naturally we wonder whether the wine that was taken was one of the Passover cups, or simply some of the table wine, an accessory to the meal just as the bread was. Whilst there was a taking of four cups of wine at the Passover, this may not be the only explanation for Luke recording the taking of two of them. It could simply be that as they were eating the Passover lamb, they ate bread and drunk weak wine as part of the accompaniments which went with every Palestinian meal. And the Lord twice passed comment on the wine, that it represented His blood. This would be similar to the manner in which He chose the bread, the *artos*, the ordinary word for bread rather than one referring specifically to unleavened bread, as the symbol for His body- rather than the meat of the Passover lamb. He could have made use of the blood of the Passover lamb as a symbol in some way- e.g. He could have asked a servant to bring the blood of the lamb and asked the disciples to all dip their fingers in it. But instead He uses wine as a symbol of His blood. My hunch is that the wine was the ordinary table wine accompanying the meal, just as the bread was, and was not the ritually significant Passover cup. In any case, the tradition of drinking cups of wine at Passover was non-Biblical, and somehow out of keeping with the original spirit of Passover, which was to remember the haste with which the first Passover was eaten. 1 Cor. 10:16 speaks of "the cup of blessing which *we* bless", with the emphasis on the "we". We are to do what the Lord did that night- not be mere audience figures, but actually do what He did.

All of you, drink it- The appeal for all to drink it was surely said because some were doubtful as to whether they should take it. Perhaps there were others in the room apart from the twelve. But most likely this was yet

another appeal to Judas- to drink the cup of salvation and forgiveness. He gave the reason in :28- "For", or because, this was the symbol of the means for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's attitude to Judas leaves us realizing we should never give up with the lost. Even the very worst of them. And given the Lord's eagerness that Judas break bread, we can hardly conclude that any sinner is thereby unworthy of participation at the breaking of bread. It is after all His table and not ours. This isn't to say that forms of discipline may not be required at times, but welcome at the Lord's table should never be withdrawn.

26:28 *For this is My blood*- Given Jewish obsession with blood and ritual uncleanness arising from contact with it, such language was surely purposefully challenging and radical, just as He had spoken of eating His flesh and drinking His blood in Jn. 6:53. This made many turn away when He said it, but the Lord realized that His followers had to make a total break with Judaism. The drift of some Christian believes back towards the mentality of Judaism is totally missing the Lord's point- He was speaking in such challenging terms to make His followers realize that there was no middle path of compromise between Him and Judaism. Although He never commanded them to leave the synagogue system, and assumed they would remain in it until they were thrown out of it, all the same the Lord stated His principles in such a way that it would've been effectively impossible for His followers to remain within that system.

Of the covenant- The promises to Abraham were effectively the new covenant, even though they were given before the old covenant [the law of Moses] was given. The Lord's death confirmed those promises made to the Jewish fathers (Rom. 15:8). But God's word is true as it stands and in that sense needs no confirmation, no guarantee of truthfulness. But in an effort to persuade us of the simple truth and reality of the promises of eternity in the Kingdom which were made to Abraham, God confirmed it through the death of His Son. This was foreseen in the horror of great darkness which Abraham experienced in Genesis 15. Abraham did nothing to confirm his side of the covenant; it was God who passed between the pieces of the slain animal, during a time of Divine darkness as there was on the cross, in order to demonstrate to Abraham and to us all how serious He was about keeping His promise. Through the death of Christ, God commended His love to us (Rom. 5:8), He confirmed the covenant; not that He needed to do so, nor that His love needs any more commendation to us. But He did, in order to seek to persuade us of the truth of the promises which comprise the Gospel (Gal. 3:8). In this sense "the promise was made sure [s.w. 'confirmed'] to all the seed" (Rom. 4:16); the extra element of making sure or confirming the promise was in the death of God's Son. Our hope is therefore "sure *and* confirmed [AV "steadfast"]" (Heb. 6:19). Heb. 9:17 puts it another way in saying that a will or legacy is only confirmed [AV "of force"] by the death of the one who promised the inheritance, and the death of Christ was God's way of

confirming the truth of what He had promised. This same word meaning 'confirmed' is used by Peter in writing of how we have "the word of prophecy made sure / confirmed" (2 Pet. 1:19). The prophesied word is the word of the Gospel, the promise of the Kingdom which began in Genesis, and this has been confirmed to us, made even more sure, by the Lord's death. Peter isn't referring to prophecy in the sense of future events being predicted in the arena of world geopolitics; the prophesied word is the word of our salvation, of the Gospel- which is how Peter elsewhere uses the idea of "the word". God can save who He wishes, as, how and when He wishes. He was not somehow duty bound, left with no option, forced by an unpleasant logical bind to suffer the death of His Son. He gave His Son, according to His own plan from the beginning. But He did it that way in order to persuade us of His love and simple desire to give us the Kingdom He has promised from the beginning of His revelation to men. The Lord's blood is "of the new covenant" not in that it *is itself* the new covenant, but rather in that it is the blood associated with the confirmation of that covenant as true. And so it is understandable that the Lord should wish us to understand His blood as the blood of the new covenant, the supreme sign that it is for real, and desire us to regularly take that cup which reminds us of these things. Heb. 6:17,18 carries the same idea- that in order to demonstrate the utter certainty of the things promised to Abraham's seed, God confirmed it by an oath so that we might a strong consolation and persuasion of the certainty of the promise. The death of God's Son was not therefore unavoidable for Him; He could save us as He wishes. But He chose this most painful way in the ultimate attempt to persuade men of the reality of His Son. With this understanding we can better appreciate the tales of the old missionaries who went to pagan and illiterate tribes and reported a strange response to their message once they explained the idea of the Son of God dying on a cross to show us God's love. It must be persuasive to us too, week by week as we reflect on the blood of the covenant.

"Covenant" literally means that which is to be disposed of or distributed, and was used about the distribution of property upon decease. The Lord's parables about the Master who distributes all His wealth and possessions to His servants were surely looking forward to His death, at which He gave us all He had- and that was and is visually symbolized in the breaking of bread, the division even of His body and life blood amongst us, for us to trade with.

Which is poured out for many for the remission of sins- He perhaps followed this by saying "Shed for you" (Lk. 22:20). This is often the way with Biblical statements- the general and global is stated, and then the scale is focused down to you personally. His blood was shed for many... but for you. However we may also have here a similar idea to that expressed in the parable of the man [Christ] who finds treasure [us] in

the field of the world, and therefore gives all in order to redeem the field, in order to get us as His own (13:44). Likewise His blood was shed for many, the redemption price was paid for humanity, that He might redeem us. Putting Lk. 22:20 and Mt. 26:28 together, the Lord may have said: "... My blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins of you / for the remission of *your* sins". One wonders whether the Lord actually was pouring out the wine as He spoke the word "shed". The same word for "shed" is used of how the new wine put into old bottles "runs out". The idea may be that if we don't change, then we crucify Christ afresh. But the Lord may also have in mind that if Israel had accepted the wine of the new covenant which He preached, then the shedding of His blood could have been avoidable. The fact it could have been avoidable- for Israel didn't *have* to crucify their King- doesn't mean that God was not behind it, using it to confirm the covenant with us, nor that Christ did not of Himself give His own life. "Poured out" is ongoing, Gk. 'is being shed', another hint at the ongoing nature of His death.

26:29 *But I say to you, I shall not drink of this fruit of the vine from this time forward, until*- An allusion to how the priest on duty was not to drink wine during his service. The Lord foresaw His work from then on, beginning with the cross, as an active doing of priestly work for us. This would imply that the essence of His work on the cross is the essence of His work for us today; there is a continuity between Him there and His work for us now, with elements of the same pain and passionate focus upon us and the achievement of our salvation. He is not waiting passively in Heaven for the time to return; He is actively busy for us. There is also the implication in His words that His future 'drinking' will be literal- He was holding literal wine in His hand, and He said He would not again drink it until the Kingdom. This suggests that at very least, He invites us to understand His future Messianic banquet as being in some ways a literal feast.

The Lord clearly taught the continuity between the breaking of bread and the future marriage supper by observing that He would not again drink the cup until He drinks it with us in the Kingdom. The parables of how the Gospel invites people as it were to a meal are suggesting that we should see the Kingdom as a meal, a supper, of which our memorial service is but a foretaste. We are commanded to enter the supper and take the lowest seat (Lk. 14:10), strongly aware that others are present more honourable than ourselves. Those with this spirit are simply never going to dream of telling another guest 'Leave! Don't partake of the meal!'. But this is the spirit of those who are exclusive and who use the Lord's table as a weapon in their hands to wage their petty church wars. The very early church didn't behave like this, but instead sought to incarnate and continue the pattern of the meals of the Lord Jesus during His ministry. And this is one major reason why their unity drew such attention, and they grew. To exclude someone from the Lord’s table is to judge them as

excluded from the Kingdom banquet. And those who make such judgment will themselves be rejected from it.

That day when I drink it anew with you- This is not 'new' in the sense of freshly made (a different word is used for that), but new in terms of quality, not time. It speaks of a new quality, a freshness, rather than something 'new' in chronological terms. The new wine represented the blood of the new covenant which was shed on the cross. It could be argued that the drinking of this new wine became possible not simply at the last day, but in this life too, in the experience of the church after the Lord's shedding of that blood on the cross.

In my Father's Kingdom- The reference is primarily to the literal Kingdom to be established on earth at His return (Lk. 22:29,30 goes on to speak of the disciples eating and drinking in the Kingdom as they sit with Christ on His throne judging Israel), but there is a sense in which His word is fulfilled in the breaking of bread service, where He drinks wine with us as the invisible guest. For His parables of the Kingdom all speak of the experience of God's reign / Kingship as a present experience in the lives of His people. Lk. 22:16 adds with reference to the bread: "Until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God". The fulfilment of Passover deliverance is finally in the last day, and yet the fulfilment of Passover is also to be seen in the breaking of bread service. Note in passing that the Lord's predilection for the term 'Kingdom of God' or 'Father's Kingdom' was perhaps to counterbalance the Jewish emphasis upon the Kingdom as being that of *our* father *David* (Mk. 11:10). The Kingdom was God's, "*Yours* is the Kingdom", rather than simply and solely the re-establishment of Israel's Kingdom.

26:30 *And when they had sung a hymn*- Probably the Passover hallel of Ps. 115-118. It's worth reading those Psalms imagining them on the lips of the Lord at the last supper; they are pregnant with relevance for His forthcoming death, especially the reference to "I will take the cup of salvation". Heb. 2:12 surely has the scene in mind, quoting "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto You" as being proof of the Lord's absolute humanity. The fact He sung praise to *God* surely reveals a human and not Divine Christ. But doing so amongst His brethren, "the church", as one of them, is an essay in His unity with us, both in nature and experience.

They went out to the Mount of Olives- The Passover ritual required that nobody should go out of the house until morning (Ex. 12:22). This is clearly teaching that the Passover deliverance had already begun, even before the Lord's blood had been shed, and would connect with the usage of present tenses concerning the Passover and shedding of the Lord's blood (see on :2,28). This sets the scene for the Lord's comment in :32 that He would go before them, and they should follow Him. He was as

Moses and as the Angel which went before Israel on Passover night. The allusion to Ex. 12:22 shows that the old legislation had passed away, and in any case the type of Passover being kept by the Lord was not strictly the Mosaic one- for it's likely He was celebrating it a day earlier than stipulated. But the point perhaps was that the true Israel of God were now 'going out' from Egypt; so certain was the Lord that He would achieve deliverance that He could speak of that deliverance as already being achieved. He didn't, therefore, see His work on the cross as something which He might or might not successfully achieve- as we should, He went ahead in the certainty of ultimate success and victory.

26:31 *Then Jesus said to them: You will all fall away because of me this night*- They would spiritually stumble and fall because Zech. 13:7 predicted this would happen. But the Lord goes on to urge them to watch and pray so that they do not succumb to temptation (:41). He saw Biblical prophecy as being open ended in fulfilment- the prophecy of spiritual failure didn't have to come true. They could resist, sin and failure is never inevitable. He spoke to them in the upper room specifically so that they would *not* be offended (Jn. 16:1 s.w.); the prophecy didn't have to come true in the disciples, and the Lord did His utmost to provide the potential for it not coming true for them.

For it is written: I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad- His death was to be as that of Moses, which left the Israel of God as sheep without a shepherd (Num. 27:17). And yet the Lord's death would gather together the scattered [s.w.] people of God (Jn. 11:52), His death was as a shepherd giving His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11). His death and resurrection was to be the means of reviving the lost faith of the disciples- when they meditated upon it. The people of Israel at the Lord's time had had no true shepherds and were therefore as scattered sheep (Mt. 9:36). The Lord's death would therefore temporarily leave the disciples just like the rest of Israel- they would return to the mentality of Judaism, the 'satan' of the Jewish system and its thinking would tempt them and they would give in. The wolf of Judaism would scatter the sheep (Jn. 10:12). The disciples were therefore as sheep who scattered because of the thinking of the Jewish world around them, who saw death on a cross as the final defeat for a man; and yet were to be gathered by that very death. Peter was one of those disciples, even though he insisted that *he* would not be scattered even if others were. He surely had this in mind in appealing to other believers who were falling under the influence of Judaism: "You were as sheep going astray, but are now returned [s.w. 'converted'- just as he was 'converted' to strengthen his brethren] unto the Shepherd... of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). Peter was therefore appealing to others to follow his own pattern- of revival and conversion after spiritual failure. This is the basis for all powerful pastoral appeal.

26:32 *But after I am raised up*- There is no equivalent of "after" in the Greek text. This is an insertion by translators in order to try to give sense to the three brief Greek words which simply say "And I rise again". The idea is that 'By My rising again, I will go before you...'. The Lord's plan was that His resurrection would re-ignite faith in His disciples, and He would go before them as a shepherd leads His sheep, into Galilee.

I will go ahead of you into Galilee- This is the language of the shepherd going before the sheep (Jn. 10:4), in obedience to His voice. The Lord is saying that although they will stumble and lose faith, His resurrection will provide them with a credible word from Him which they would obey by following Him into Galilee. This is why the resurrected Lord's first instruction to the women was to "Go tell My brothers that they go into Galilee; there shall they see Me" (28:10). But it actually didn't work out like that. His meeting with them in Galilee was in fact the third time He revealed Himself to them (Jn. 21:14). He appeared to them twice before that. And the picture we have of the disciples fishing in Galilee in Jn. 21 is of them still relatively faithless, depressed and having returned to their fishing; they are hardly pictured as eagerly awaiting the Lord's promised appearance in Galilee. So it seems to me that the Lord changed His intended program with them. Their faith was so weak that He appeared to them in Jerusalem twice, whereas He had originally planned for the women to tell them His word- to go before Him into Galilee, and there He would reveal Himself to them. But in His love for them, His own desire to see them, His awareness of their weakness in faith... He appeared to them twice *before* Galilee. And even then, we sense from the fishing incident of John 21 that they were still floundering in their faith, and may well have returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, rather than in obedience to His word. Why did He so wish to meet them in Galilee, rather than in Jerusalem? Their journey to Galilee would've been a test of obedience for them, for sure. But surely the Lord reflected by this choice the paramount importance He placed upon the conversion of families. He wanted to appear to them there, surely, because that was where most of them were from, and where their families were. He wanted them too to be persuaded once and for all time of the reality of His resurrection.

26:33 *But Peter answered and said to him: If they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away*- Peter three separate times states that he will not fail the Lord (also in Lk. 22:33; Jn. 13:37). Literally, 'not at any time', i.e. 'not even once'. Hence the Lord's comment that Peter would deny Him not once but three times. Yet he denied the Lord three times, and it was on the Lord's third appearance to him (Jn. 21:14) that the Lord undid the three denials by His three questions concerning whether Peter really loves Him, and three times (again by a charcoal fire) re-instates Peter in the work of strengthening his brethren. These tripilisms and repetitions serve to make the record memorable, and also reflect how somehow the Lord

worked through Peter's failures with some overarching plan; there was a higher hand at work through all of the failure, reflected in these tripilisms which could only have been effected by a Divine, higher hand. The Lord's question to Peter "Do you love Me more than these?" surely has reference to the other disciples, whom Peter had thought himself spiritually superior to. He was sure that even if they stumbled, he would not. And the Lord paid special attention to undoing this attitude in Peter and specifically bringing him to realize that he was no better than his brethren. Any sense of spiritual superiority over others is so obnoxious to the Lord. And He will work in our lives to remove it from us, as He did with Job, Jonah and many others. Peter continually alludes to his denials throughout his appeal for Israel's repentance in Acts 2 and throughout his pastoral letters; it is our own failures and receipt of such utter grace which serve as the basis for our credible and persuasive appeal to others to repent. He spoke in 1 Pet. 2:8 of how the Lord Jesus is a stone of stumbling ['offence', s.w.] to those who do not believe- and yet he said this fully aware that he had been one of those who stumbled over Jesus. Mt. 21:44 offers us to the choice- to stumble upon the stone and be broken, or for the stone to fall upon us and grind us to powder, in the figure of judgment and condemnation used in Daniel 2. We either stumble in failure upon Christ and rise up as Peter did, broken men and women, to do our best in serving Him- or that stone shall crush us in condemnation. That is the choice before us, and Peter is the parade example in this to all.

26:34 *Jesus said to him: Truly I say to you, that this night*- Much of the Lord's knowledge and foreknowledge of events ahead of time can be explained in terms of His incredible sensitivity to others, His understanding of human psychology and behaviour patterns. But there are times when it seems He was given direct foreknowledge from the Father. And this seems one of them- to predict the exact number of denials that would be made that night, and to predict they would happen before the cock crew. This leads to the possibility that whenever He prefaces His words with "Truly I say unto you...", He is stating something received by direct revelation. Another example is when He uses this rubric to introduce His prediction of how Peter would die (Jn. 21:18). This would be His equivalent of how the Old Testament prophets introduced their directly inspired words with the rubric "Thus says the Lord". "Truly" (AV "verily") is literally 'amen', as if the Lord Jesus is saying that He is aware of the words of His Father and in uttering them from His lips, is giving His personal agreement, stamp or 'Amen!' to them.

Before the cock crows- There is no article in the Greek. 'Before cock crow' is the idea, before the earliest sign of morning when the first cock crew, that very night, before that night even began to come to a close.

You shall deny me three times- See on :35 *Deny You*.

26:35 *Peter said to him: Even if I must die with you*- Gk. 'If I must die' or 'If it be necessary that I die, I will'. And yet the Lord had taught that He was going to die on the cross, and that all who would truly follow Him should likewise die with Him. When the Lord stated this in Mt. 16, Peter had earnestly sought to dissuade the Lord from that course of action because He didn't want to die with Him. Peter had a problem accepting the inevitable reality of the cross and its demand that we likewise lose our lives for Him. He considered it the most extreme possibility, rather than an obviously necessary sacrifice which is part and parcel of being a true follower of Jesus. We likewise can consider that extreme self-sacrifice is something we might possibly be called to make. But in fact if we are truly signed up to carrying the Lord's cross, it is exactly such radical self-sacrifice which is indeed required of us. The Lord said that Peter was not yet able to die for Him, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and *then* he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

I will not deny you- Surely the allusion is again to 16:24, where the Lord has urged Peter to accept that he must deny *himself* and take up the Lord's cross and die with Him. But instead, because Peter didn't want to do that, he would end up denying Jesus. This is the intensity of our choice- if we will not deny ourselves, then we shall deny Jesus. The Lord had clearly taught that whoever denied Him before men would be denied by Him at the last day (10:33), and Paul repeats this (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter stood condemned by that denial, and yet we can be condemned in this life and change the verdict if we repent. It is this which releases such fervency into our lives if we go through the experience of condemnation but perceive that the verdict has been mercifully changed. Peter appealed to Israel to recognize that they had denied Jesus (Acts 3:13,14 "You denied Him in the presence of Pilate"); and he made that appeal a stone's throw and only a few weeks after his own denials of Jesus in the presence of all. And yet this was why his appeal was so credible, as was his later appeal to believers not to do the worst imaginable thing, namely to deny the Lord who had bought them- for that was exactly what, as everyone knew, Peter had himself done (2 Pet. 2:1). John speaks of denying Christ as the hallmark of the antichrist (1 Jn. 2:22 "He that denies Jesus... is the antichrist"), and he wrote this knowing full well that Peter was the rock upon whom the early church had been built. His point, therefore, is that even those who had done that, the antichrist, could still repent as Peter had done.

Likewise said all the disciples- AV "Likewise also". Two words are used when one would suffice, such is the emphasis upon the fact that they all said the same. Peter was the one who went furthest in seeking to live out

his claim, and yet he it is whose failure is the most emphasized. And that is how it is often is amongst God's people. But it is because we are asked to identify specifically with Peter.

26:36 *Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane*- The Lord often went to this garden (Jn. 18:2), but the record at this point emphasizes its name, meaning 'oil press', a common metaphor for judgment. There the Lord as it were passed through His judgment, and there the disciples had their judgment- and ran away into the darkness condemned. Even though through repentance they were later saved out of that condemnation.

And he said to his disciples: Sit here- The Greek can equally mean 'stay here'. The separation between the Lord and His people, to go away and pray with His senior followers with Him, clearly was based upon Moses going up into the mountain to pray to God, taking Joshua with him, leaving Israel behind. And like Israel, the disciples failed miserably, and were met with the Lord's rebuke on His return from prayer. The Lord is clearly making the point that He now replaces Moses, and that the new Israel were comprised of those 11 mixed up men of weak faith and very limited understanding. The Greek text here has the Lord saying to the disciples: "Sit in this place [*kathisate autou*] until going away, I pray there", and then He takes along with him [*paralambanein*] Peter. These are the very words used in the Gen. 22 LXX account of Abraham taking Isaac to 'the cross'. Jesus is seeking to encourage Peter to see himself as Isaac, being taken to share in the cross. Now whether Peter discerned this or not, we don't know. But the Lord gave him the potential possibility to be inspired like this.

While I go yonder and pray- Literally, 'there', as if the Lord was pointing out a location not far distant. He was seeking to help them perceive the similarity with Moses going away to pray, hence His warnings for them *not to* give way to temptation were asking them to consciously make the effort to not be like the Israel whom Moses left behind when he went away to pray. Of course the Lord could have baldly drawn the similarities between Himself and Moses, but He acted in this way in order to provoke in them the association with Moses, and to realize that they were as Israel, tempted to fall away. And this is His style to the present day. Instead of flashing red lights and words dropping from Heaven, instead we find ourselves set up in situations which recall Biblical situations, and appeal to us to perceive ourselves within that history. That is why daily Bible reading and continual familiarity with the recorded histories of the Bible is so essential, it is all part of the Lord's way of working with us.

26:37 *And he took with him*- As Moses took Joshua with him.

Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed- This was the fulfilment of Is. 53:3, "a man of sorrows", an intensive plural, implying 'great sorrow'. The fact He 'began' to feel this suggests that the prophecy of Is. 53 is specifically about the Lord in His time of sufferings, rather than generally in His life. It was there, at the end, that there was no beauty that He should be desired. And yet Is. 53:4 defines those 'sorrows' as the sorrows of our sins. His sorrow was therefore in that He felt His identification with our sins, our sorrows. And He felt that identification very intensely as He prayed. Likewise the weight He felt, in that He began to feel heavy, refers to the weight of human sin which He felt Himself carrying.

Mk. 14:33 adds that He was “amazed”. The amazement was perhaps because He came to realize that His subconscious hopes for a deliverance, akin to Isaac’s at the last minute, were not going to come true. This element of surprise is reflected later in His desperate question “Why have You forsaken Me?”. This crisis of understanding contrasts strongly with His calm assurance and assumption that He must now die and resurrect. And yet to be tempted just as we are, He had to go through the experience of things not working out as expected, of crisis and desperate desiring to understand. For these things are what are at the root of our hardest human experiences.

26:38 *Then he said to them: My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death*- The Lord’s psychological struggle was so intense that it was almost killing Him. Yet Peter had said that he was ready to go with the Lord even unto death (Lk. 22:33). But he failed to perceive that the Lord’s death involved huge psychological suffering- and Peter opted out of that by falling asleep. To physically die was not so much the issue as sharing the psychological trauma of carrying the cross.

The fullness of the Lord's humanity is of course supremely shown in His death and His quite natural fear of that death. Perhaps on no other point do human beings show they are humans than when it comes to their reaction to and reflection upon their own death. I would go further and suggested that the thought of suicide even entered the Lord's mind. It's hard to understand His thought about throwing Himself off the top of the temple in any other way. His almost throw away comment that "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (*heos thanatou*) is actually a quotation from the suicidal thoughts of Jonah (Jonah 4:9) and those of the Psalmist in Ps. 42:5,6. Now of course the Lord overcame those thoughts- but their very existence is a window into the depth and reality of His humanity.

Heb. 5:7,8 clearly refer to the Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane. The Lord had a quite genuine "fear of death" (Heb. 5:8). This "fear of death" within the Lord Jesus provides a profound insight into His so genuine humanity. We fear death because our human life is our greatest and most personal possession... and it was just the same with the Lord Jesus. Note that

when seeking here to exemplify Christ's humanity, the writer to the Hebrews chooses His fear of death in Gethsemane as the epitome of His humanity. Heb. 5:7 comments that Christ prayed "with strong crying and tears". These words are certainly to be connected with Rom. 8:26, which speaks of Christ making intercession for us now with "groanings which cannot be uttered". Rom. 8:26 says that his groaning is so intense that it cannot be audibly uttered; the physicality of sound would not do justice to the intensity of mental striving. The point is that the same agonizing depth of prayer which the Lord achieved for us is what he now goes through as he intercedes for us with the Father.

Oscar Cullmann translates Heb. 5:7: "He was heard in his fear (anxiety)". That very human anxiety about death is reflected in the way He urges Judas to get over and done the betrayal process "quickly" (Jn. 13:28); He was "straitened until it be accomplished" (Lk. 12:50). He prayed to God just as we would when gripped by the fear of impending death. And He was heard. No wonder He is able therefore and thereby to comfort and save us, who lived all our lives in the same fear of death which He had (Heb. 2:15). This repetition of the 'fear of death' theme in Hebrews is surely significant- the Lord Jesus had the same fear of death as we do, and He prayed in desperation to God just as we do. And because He overcame, He is able to support us when *we* in our turn pray in *our* "time of need"- for He likewise had the very same "time of need" as we have, when He was in Gethsemane (Heb. 4:16). Death was "the last enemy" for the Lord Jesus just as it is for all humanity (1 Cor. 15:26). Reflection on these things not only emphasizes the humanity of the Lord Jesus, but also indicates He had no belief whatsoever in an 'immortal soul' consciously surviving death.

"Exceeding sorrowful" uses the same word used about the exceeding sorrow of the men of the world (Herod- Mk. 6:26; the rich young man, Lk. 18:23,24). Those who will be rich pierce themselves through with sorrows, they go through the crucifixion pains for the sake of this world (1 Tim. 6:10). So it's a cross either way, and it may as well be in identification with the Lord, leading unto eternal life, than unto eternal death. The same point is made in 2 Cor. 7:10, where the same word translated "sorrowful" is found- the sorrow of the world leads to death, but Godly sorrow leads to salvation. The disciples fell asleep, and yet by pure grace the record says that they slept for "sorrow" (Lk. 22:45), using a related but less intense word as used here for the Lord's *exceeding* sorrow; and the Lord attributes such "sorrow" to them repeatedly at this time (Jn. 16:6,20-22). But the point is that His sorrow was of an altogether more intense and higher order than theirs, and yet by grace they are counted as having some part in His sorrow. We speak and read of our sharing in the Lord's sufferings, and yet our sufferings are nothing compared to His; yet by grace they are counted as a sharing in those sufferings.

Stay here- This is *meno*, the word the Lord has just used multiple times in the upper room discourse, translated "abide". Now He leads them out of the upper room into the real world, and gives them the concrete outworking of abiding in Him- to enter into His struggles, to watch and pray with Him, to share His intensity with the Father. And they fell asleep.

And watch with me- The Greek means to literally keep awake, but is used about watching in prayer. The fact the disciples physically fell asleep, and three times, is a clear statement of their failure. And it is used by the disciples here in their own account and preaching of the Gospel, of which the Gospel records are transcripts, as if to emphasize their own failure, and on that basis appeal to others to likewise accept the Lord's forgiveness and salvation by grace. It is the same word used repeatedly by the Lord in appealing for watchfulness in the very last days before His coming (Mt. 24:42,43; Lk. 12:37 etc.), as if the disciples in Gethsemane were going through their judgment, their last days. Likewise the sufferings and experiences of the very last generation will give them the opportunity to uniquely identify with the Lord's crucifixion sufferings. Seeing that generation will never taste of death, this identification with His death will be necessary for them as for no other generation, and the tribulation will be designed to elicit that identification. We are therefore invited to enter into Gethsemane and not repeat the failures of the disciples- the same words are used by Paul in encouraging us all to 'pray and watch' (Col. 4:2). "Let us not sleep as others, but let us watch" (1 Thess. 5:6) could be asking us to not be as the disciples there, but rather to learn from their failure and watch. And yet the comfort of grace is that whether we watch [s.w.] or sleep, we shall be accepted by Him (1 Thess. 5:10), just as the disciples were saved by grace despite their failure. Likewise we are asked to watch and keep our garment (Rev. 16:15), unlike the disciple present in Gethsemane who did not watch and fled naked having lost his garment (Mk. 14:52).

26:39 *And he went forward a little and*- Lk. 22:41 “About a stone’s cast”, pointing us back to David’s conflict with Goliath as a type of the Lord’s final conflict with sin.

Fell on his face and prayed, saying: My Father- Paul's description of himself on the Damascus road falling down and seeing a Heavenly vision, surrounded by men who did not understand, is framed in exactly the language of Gethsemane (Acts 22:7 = Mt. 26:39); as if right at his conversion, Paul was brought to realize the spirit of Gethsemane. His connection with the Gethsemane spirit continued. He describes himself as "sorrowful" (2 Cor. 6:10), just as Christ was then (Mt. 26:37). His description of how he prayed the same words three times without receiving an answer (2 Cor. 12:8) is clearly linked to Christ's experience

in the garden (Mt. 26:44); and note that in that context he speaks of being “buffeted” by Satan’s servants, using the very word used of the Lord being “buffeted” straight after Gethsemane (2 Cor. 12:7 = Mt. 26:67).

To fall on the face is used in the Old Testament to describe men like Abraham and Moses falling on their face in the visible presence of God, e.g. before an Angel (Gen. 17:3; Num. 16:4; 22:31). Yet there was no visible manifestation of God’s presence at this time; so we are to assume that the Lord Jesus intensely perceived the Father’s presence even though there was no visible sign of it. It could be that the Angel from Heaven strengthening the Lord had already appeared, but this appears to come *after* the Lord had fallen on His face.

If it be possible, let this cup pass away from me- This may not simply mean 'If it's possible, may I not have to die'. The Lord could have meant: 'If *it*- some unrecorded possible alternative to the cross- is *really* possible, then let *this* cup pass'- as if to say 'If option A is possible, then let the cup of option B pass from me'. But He overrode this with a desire to be submissive to the Father's preferred will- which was for us to have a part in the greatest, most surpassing salvation, which required the death of the cross. “Such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) might imply that a lesser salvation could have been achieved by Christ, but He achieved the greatest possible. "He is able also *to save them to the uttermost* that come unto God by him" (Heb. 7:25) may be saying the same thing. Indeed, the *excellence* of our salvation in Christ is a major NT theme. It was typified by the way Esther interceded for Israel; she could have simply asked for her own life to be spared, but she asked for that of all Israel. And further, she has the courage (and we sense her reticence, how difficult it was for her) to ask the King yet another favour- that the Jews be allowed to slay their enemies for one more day, and also to hang Haman's sons (Es. 9:12). She was achieving the maximum possible redemption for Israel rather than the minimum. Paul again seems to comment on this theme when he speaks of how Christ became obedient, "*even* to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8), as if perhaps some kind of salvation could have been achieved without the death *of the cross*. Perhaps there was no theological necessity for Christ to die *such* a painful death; if so, doubtless this was in His mind in His agony in the garden.

The Lord had taught more than once that “with God all things are possible” (19:26; Mk. 9:23), and yet He inserts here a condition: “If it be possible”. He recognized that God’s plan was possible of fulfilment by any means, and yet He recognized that there was a condition to that. This issue is not really resoluble, at least not by any intellectual process. If, or rather when, we struggle with these issues, this balance between God’s ultimate possibility and the fact there appear to be terms and conditions attached- then we are there with the Lord in Gethsemane. But we need to

note that it was God who was being pushed to the limit here as well- for literally all things are indeed possible to Him, and He could have saved the world any way He wished. In His allowing of this chosen method we see the degree to which the cross was indeed His plan that He so wanted to see worked out.

"Let this cup pass" is interpreted in Mk. 14:35 as "That the hour might pass". He saw the cup and His "hour" of death as the same thing. The challenging thing is that He invites us to drink His cup, to share in His final hour… even when He Himself found this so hard to drink.

Paul uses the same Greek term "from me" in describing how also three times he asked for the thorn in the flesh to "depart *from me*" (2 Cor. 12:8). He saw his prayers and desires as a sharing in the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane, just as we can too.

Nevertheless- The saying of these brief words lasted long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. "Could you not watch with Me for one hour?" (:40) suggests not 'even just for one hour' but rather 'We've been here an hour, and you couldn't watch with me even for that short period of time'. So it took the Lord an hour to say the words recorded here, which can be spoken in a few seconds. We have a window here into the essence of prayer; the words can be spoken quickly, but saying with meaning can take far longer. There may well have been many minutes in between each word here. And doubtless He said the same words and repeated the ideas several times, which would explain the slight differences in wording at this point between the Gospel records.

Not as I will, but as You will- Trinitarians need to note that the Lord's will was not totally the same as that of His Father.

26:40 *And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter: What!*- "Comes… and finds" are the very words used of the Lord's coming in judgment to 'find' the state of His people (21:19; 24:46 "whom his Lord when He *comes* shall *find* so doing"; Lk. 18:8 "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith…?"). And His 'coming' to the disciples found them asleep and unprepared. This was exactly the picture of Mk. 13:36 (and Lk. 12:37), using the same Greek words: "Watch… lest coming suddenly, He find you sleeping". We can be condemned in this life, as Peter was when he denied his Lord, and yet be saved out of it by repentance.

Could you not watch with me for one hour?- Peter later urged his converts to "be watchful" (1 Pet. 5:8 RV), watching unto prayer as the end approaches (1 Pet. 4:7), as Peter had *not* been watchful in the garden and had earned the Lord's rebuke for going to sleep praying (Mt. 26:40,41). They were to learn from his mistake. Their watchfulness was to be because the devil was prowling around, seeking whom he could

desire (1 Pet. 5:8). This was exactly the case with Peter: Satan desired to have him, he should have prayed for strength but didn't do so sufficiently (Lk. 22:31). He was warning his brethren that they were in exactly the situation he had been in, a few hours before he went into that fateful High Priest's house.

Paul was deeply moved by the Gethsemane record: 1 Thess. 5:6,7 = Mt. 26:40,41; Eph. 6:18 = 26:4;1 Acts 22:7= 26:39; 2 Cor. 6:10 = 26:37; 2 Cor. 12:8 = 26:44; Rom. 5:6 = 26:41; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6 = Mk. 14:36.

26:41 *Watch and pray*- The repeated emphasis upon their lack of watching contrasts with the Lord's stress upon the need to watch in the last days, and how lack of watching would lead to condemnation (24:42,43; 25:13). Their lack of watching meant they were condemned- and yet they were redeemed by their recognition of their state, as evidenced in the Gospel records.

That you may not enter into- These words are addressed to Peter in the singular, and yet the "you" here is plural. The Lord is telling Peter that he is no different to the rest of the disciples, despite his assertion that even if they all denied the Lord, he would not do so. Peter's sense of spiritual superiority was especially displeasing to the Lord.

Temptation- Each statement of the apparently simple model prayer needs careful reflection. The Lord told the disciples in Gethsemane to earnestly pray the simple saying: "Pray not to fail in the test" (Mt. 26:41 cp. 6:13). The prayer that they could gabble mindlessly must be prayed with intense attention to every phrase. They presumably did pray as directed, but the Lord later warns them: "Why do you sleep? Get up and pray, so that you will not enter into temptation". He intended them to keep on praying, as He spent an hour praying the same words; and not just rattle off a few words and think we have done our praying. Just as the tribulation of the last days seems to be conditional upon our faith, so the Lord may imply that entering into the time of trial or testing was avoidable by their prayer and faith. Again we see the final time of tribulation as reflective of the Lord's sufferings, enabling the very last generation to identify with the Lord's death so that they might share in His resurrection.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak- The question is whether the Lord is making a general observation about human nature, or whether He is specifically criticizing them for being spiritually weak at that specific time. He could be saying that they underestimated the power of human nature, and needed to pray that they would not enter into the temptation posed by their own flesh, their humanity. This is a clear demonstration of the source of spiritual weakness- our own flesh, rather than any superhuman being. Or it could be that the Lord has in view the specific weakness of the flesh- to disown Him in the face of opposition and the risk of arrest and death.

The word "weak" is often used about spiritual weakness. Paul describes all of us as having been saved although we were weak, using the same word used about the disciples asleep in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:41 "weak" = Rom. 5:6 "without strength"). He saw the evident similarity between them and us, tragically indifferent in practice to the mental agony of our Lord, failing to share His intensity of striving- although we are so willing in spirit to do this. And yet, Paul implies, be better than them. Don't be weak and sleepy as they were when Christ wanted them awake (Mt. 26:40,41 = 1 Thess. 5:6,7). Strive for the imitation of Christ's attitude in the garden (Mt. 26:41 = Eph. 6:18). And yet in Romans 7, a depressed but realistic Paul laments that he fails in this; his description of the losing battle he experienced within him between flesh and spirit is couched in the language of Christ's rebuke to the disciples in Gethsemane (the spirit was willing, but the flesh weak).

26:42 *Again a second time he went away and prayed, saying*- This is saying the same thing twice. We are enabled to imagine the Lord again walking away from them, as if Matthew's camera is located amongst the disciples and focused upon the rear view of the Lord Jesus.

My Father, If- The Lord in Gethsemane took a long time to pray the simple words: "Father, if ....". It was long enough for the disciples to fight a losing battle against drowsiness and fall fast asleep (the Greek implies). But how do you pray? With simple, staccato words and phrases like His? Or do you desperately seek for words, any words, just to make it seem you prayed, trying to be like the more mature brethren you hear praying at gatherings? Or after many years of prayer, can I ask, are you just churning out the same old phrases and ideas, with little meaning put into the words...? If the Son of God Himself prayed in such simple terms, surely we ought to likewise.

This cup- The use of "this…" suggests the Lord had so clearly in mind the course of events which were to follow. '*The* cup' would have been less specific, as if He simply knew that an ordeal was ahead. But "*this* cup" suggests He knew what the cup was specifically, and was holding that understanding in His mind as He prayed to the Father.

Cannot pass, except I drink it- The same word translated "possible" in :39 "If it be possible". Both Father and Son clearly were aware that all things are possible for the Father, and yet those who seek to do His will must accept that He will not use that possibility in a boundless sense. The contrast is between the Father's will / desire on one hand, and His boundless potential possibility on the other. If we seek to do His will or desire, to please Him, as the Lord did, then the fact He can potentially do anything for us somehow recedes in significance. We above all wish to please Him. Therefore the fact He could save us from any pain no longer weighs so heavily with us. It is primitive indeed to complain that God could have stopped a certain painful course of events. He indeed could

have done. But the issue is, whether or not we wish to do His will, to please Him, to do His work in this world. This is the significance of the Lord saying "Your will be done".

Your will be done- He had the authority to call down legions of Angels to change the course of events- implying the Father would have allowed that. All things were possible to God. The fact this possibility remained for the Lord suggests that the prayers in Gethsemane were really the Lord coming to the conclusion that He Himself wished to go ahead with the cross. It wasn't so much that He asked for the cross to be taken away from Him, and the Father said "No", and He meekly accepted it. Prayer functioned for Him as it often does for us- a means of dialogue with God and thereby with ourselves, the process of which in itself provides the answers to our deepest questions. The will of the Father is never presented in Scripture as immutable and some predestined code which we are to follow. Rather is God open to change in response to the cry of His beloved people. So the Lord's conclusion "Your will be done" is not a shrugging acceptance that in this case, He couldn't change some preordained will of God; but rather a willing desire on His own part to do the ideal wishes / will of the Father. The Lord's statement was therefore His own conclusion, His own decision to continue in the way of the cross, even though the practical realities of what it meant were now becoming more practically apparent to Him than ever before. No wonder the Father sent an Angel to strengthen His beloved Son in this fine resolve. See on 26:54 *But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled?*

26:43 *And he came again and found them sleeping*- See on :40 *Comes… and finds*.

For their eyes were heavy- It's clear from all the allusions to the need for watchfulness and the moral failure associated with sleeping, that there was really no adequate excuse for their failure. And yet the record gracefully takes note of the human weakness they were facing. We should not dismiss circumstantial ethics too quickly. Whilst sin remains sin, there is every reason for thinking that God does take circumstance into account in His final judgment of human failures. The only other time the Greek word translated "heavy" occurs in the Gospels is in Lk. 9:32, where again it is used of heaviness with sleep, and again about Peter, James and John sleeping whilst the Lord was involved in active dialogue with the Father about His forthcoming death: "Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep". Mk. 14:40 adds that "They did not know what to answer Him", and this likewise was the situation at the transfiguration (Mk. 9:6 s.w.). The events of the transfiguration were to prepare Peter, James and John for the events of Gethsemane; they were supposed to see the similarities, and learn. But they didn't. Likewise circumstances repeat in our lives, as the Father seeks to teach us, hoping we shall learn from one event which is then in essence repeated later. The way the

situation here repeats three times, and each time they fail and fall asleep, is another example of how circumstances repeat in the hope that we will learn.

26:44- see on :39.

And he left them again and went away and prayed- The language of leaving to be with the Father and coming again to the disciples is very much the language of the Lord's ascension and return (Jn. 16:28 has just recorded the Lord using this language in the Upper Room). His coming to them and finding them sleeping is therefore an enactment of the condemnation of the last day- but we can be condemned in this life, but be saved out of it by repentance.

A third time- The three failures of Peter to keep awake were clearly meant to portend his forthcoming triple failure. The Lord was seeking to educate him as to his own weakness. But he failed to perceive it. After each failure he would've urged himself not to fail again, and he would've gone through the same thoughts as time after time he denied his Lord later that night. We gasp with wonder at how the Lord was not so focused upon His own struggles that He had no thought for desperately trying to educate his beloved Peter. This is surely the mark of spiritual maturity- being able to never be so obsessed with our own struggles that we forget our responsibilities to our brethren. So often we reason that we must sort out our own issues before we can help others, but this kind of self-centredness would've meant that the Lord failed Himself to be the One He needed to be, both for Himself and for others.

Saying again the same words- If the idea was simply that He repeated again the previous words, another word would've been used. *Hautou* definitely means something like 'His own words', 'The words of Himself'. And in this we see a powerful picture of what prayer to the Father really is- praying our very own words to the Father. The intimacy of the Son with the Father is thus brought out.

26:45 *Then he came to the disciples and said to them: Sleep on now*- The Lord spoke this to them whilst they were asleep, because in :46 He asks them to arise. A lesser man than the Lord would've been bitterly disappointed, full of fear that His entire mission was open to failure if the material He had so especially focused upon saving was so incredibly weak. But instead in tenderness He speaks to them as a loving parent speaks to their sleeping children. For this seems the only credible interpretation of His words- for immediately afterwards He tells them to awake.

And take your rest- Seeing the Lord proceeds to immediately awake them from sleep, He must have had some other idea in view apart from taking

literal rest. Surely He had in view His earlier invitation to His followers to find rest in Him (11:28); He knew that He was dying so that they might have this ultimate rest to their souls.

The hour is at hand- Gk. 'is approaching'. Perhaps the Lord noticed the approach of Judas and the soldiers. Mk. 14:41 has "the hour is come". 'It is approaching... it has come' would be an appropriate thing to say in soliloquy as the Lord saw the men approaching closer. *Eggizo*, "is at hand", is the very word used specifically about Judas in :46: "He is at hand that betrays Me".

And the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners- Remember that the Greek word behind 'betrayal' means simply to be handed over. Earlier the Lord had spoken of being handed over into the hand or power of men (17:22), to the chief priests (20:18), to the Gentiles (Mk. 10:33). But now the Lord introduces a moral dimension- He was to be handed over into the power of sin, but would break that power by His resurrection. For the resurrection of the Lord was not simply a vindication of Himself against men, but against the power of sin. And this is what opens up the path to deliverance for all likewise under the power of sin. Surely Heb. 2:14 had this in mind when speaking of how the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"- sin manifested in the powers of Rome and Judaism.

26:46 *Arise!*- See on :45.

Let us be going- If this were the simple sense of the Greek, another construction would've been used. The sense is definitely 'Let us lead on'. Although going into the hands of sinners, the Lord was in control- for He insisted that His life was not taken from Him, but rather He gave it of Himself.

He that betrays me is nearby- See on :45 *The hour is at hand*.

26:47 *And while he yet spoke*- This, along with the repeated use of "Behold" or "Lo" (:45,46,47,51) encourage us to play Bible television with these events. The scene was clearly etched upon the memory of the Gospel writers. Mk. 14:43 puts it all in the present tense: "There comes Judas…", to encourage us to re-live the incident.

Judas, one of the twelve- Emphasized in all three synoptics.

Came, and with him a great crowd- This was a tacit recognition of the fanatic loyalty of the eleven; Judas reckoned that they could put up enough of a fight to require this great multitude.

With swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people- This little detail accords well with the reality of the situation. Although the

Chief Priests had some authority to use the Roman guards to control difficult situations in the temple area, they surely didn't have use of Roman soldiers to arrest a civilian in a garden at night. So these were ruffians rustled up by Judas and the Jewish leaders, which explains why they had staves as well as swords. Staves were hardly the military equipment of professional soldiers, but it fits the idea that the leaders gathered together a crowd of hoods to do this dirty work. And it was only later that the Jews handed the Lord over to Gentile power. "Staves" translates *xulon*, the word meaning 'stake' or 'tree' which is used about the cross. See on :48 "That is He".

26:48 *Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying*- These are the very words more commonly used together about signs being given to the Jewish world by the Lord. Judas was in every way a fake Christ, acting as the real disciple and the true Christ, when in fact he was the very opposite. This is why he as the "son of perdition" becomes the prototype of the antichrist figure in 2 Thess. 2. Note that 'anti-Christ' doesn't mean so much one who is *against* Christ as one who mimics the real Christ but is in fact a false one and not the original, despite all appearances.

Whomsoever I shall kiss- The Greek *phileo* literally means 'to love'. I have mentioned several times the essential similarity between the betrayals of Judas and Peter that same night. When the Lord later asks Peter whether Peter has *phileo* for Him (Jn. 21:17), He is as it were asking 'Do you kiss Me, as Judas did?'. He is probing Peter to see the similarities between himself and Judas, and to recognize that he was not in fact more loyal and devoted to Jesus than any of the others [as Peter had once claimed]- and that included even Judas.

That is He. Take him- The Lord was a well known public figure, having taught openly in Jerusalem in the presence of huge crowds. The need to identify Him indicates that the crowd of hoods being used didn't know who He was, because they were not the types to attend teaching sessions in the temple, or perhaps they weren't locals, or maybe not even Jews. Again we find the ring of truth in how these records are written; if they were anything other than Divinely inspired, there would be all manner of lack of congruence in the details and information given.

26:49 *And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him*- Most of the 74 NT occurrences of *chairo*, "hail", are translated "rejoice". Perhaps the Lord was reminded of His recent words about the cross being His "joy". But why did Judas address Him in this way? It could be that the crowd of armed men were still hidden, and he came alone to make this act of identification of Jesus- again suggesting that the crowd of hired hoods were unclear as to which one of the group of disciples was Jesus. This is why :50 says that after the kiss, "then came they"- Judas was alone when he first approached the Lord. Although the Lord later protests that He had been with 'them' in the temple teaching, presumably

that comment was directed only at the leadership of the group. Or perhaps it was simply because in the darkness it was not clear who was who, and Judas needed to make the identification for that reason. He needed to be alone to make that identification- he would've been unable to do it if he had approached Jesus and the disciples with the crowd of men next to him.

26:50 *And Jesus said to him: Friend*- During the few seconds between the kiss and the appearance of the armed men. See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

Do what you came to do- AV "Wherefore". The Greek *epi hos* doesn't simply mean 'Why?'. In this a word like *tis* would have been used. 'For what' is a reasonable translation. RV "Do that for which thou art come"- confirming a wicked man in the evil way he had chosen to take. And yet it seems to me that the Lord tried to save Judas to the last. This rhetorical question asked Judas to consider *why* he was doing this. One reason which the record gives is that he was interested in the money. He was a chronic materialist. He enquired how much he could receive for the job of betraying, and only then did he do it. The way he flung the coins down before committing suicide surely indicate how significant the money was to him. And the Lord knew that, and was asking him, even at this late moment, to consider *why* he was doing this- just for coins, pieces of metal. The Lord really was the good shepherd who searched for the lost until the very end, and sets a supreme example to us all.

'For whom' would be another possible translation of *epi hos* ["Wherefore...?"]. But why say this, when it was obvious? The Lord clearly knew what was happening- He knew the armed men were with Judas although hidden, and that they would now appear. He also knew that at least Peter had a sword and was keen to use it. In the crucial few seconds between the identification of Jesus with the kiss and the appearance of the armed men from the trees, the Lord knew that Peter could easily have killed Judas. The Lord may have been playing for time- to preserve Judas' life. Primarily this would've been in order to give Judas the possibility of repentance; but it was also to enable the foreseen sequence of events leading to the cross to happen. This makes sense of the Lord's statement at His trial, that if His Kingdom was immediate, then His servants would fight (Jn. 18:36). They wanted to fight, as Peter's rash action with his sword made clear, but the Lord disallowed them from doing this. We marvel at how conscious the Lord was on so many levels in bringing forward God's purpose, whilst allowing men the maximum possible opportunity to display faith, loyalty and repentance.

Then they came - See the reconstruction suggested at :49.

And laid hands on Jesus- The Lord uses the same expression about the sufferings of the faithful in the very last generation (Lk. 21:12), as He seeks to bring them to know the essence of His death, seeing that that generation will not taste of death but be given immortality at the judgment seat.

And took Him- Literally, they had power over Him. The same word is used in Heb. 2:14 about how the Lord overcame the 'devil' who had the 'power' of death. They had the power, apparently, externally. But the paradox was that by willingly giving Himself over to it, He had power over the 'devil' of sin, both abstractly as sin, and also in all forms of its political manifestation, in this case, the Roman and Jewish authorities.

26:51 *And one of those with Jesus*- Peter.

Stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear- The camera, as it were, is zoomed in close upon Peter. Perhaps the detail is provided as backdrop for the Lord's response- that whoever *takes* the sword shall perish by it (:52). Peter did indeed take the sword- but by grace was saved from the consequence. He clearly aimed to strike off the man's head, but he ducked and Peter only caught his ear.

The material from Mark is about the same as in Matthew, but Luke and John add various details. Here is Matthew's account of the arrest in the Garden, with the details from Luke 22 and John 18 (on which see commentary) added in square brackets:

"The hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise! Let us be going. He that betrays me is nearby. And while he yet spoke, Judas, one of the twelve, came; and with him a great crowd with swords and staves, from the chief priest and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he. Take him. [Lk. 22:47,48 He drew near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him: Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?] And immediately he came to Jesus, and said, Greetings, Rabbi; and kissed him. And Jesus said to him: Friend, do what you came to do. [Lk. 22 And when they that were about him saw what would follow, they said: Lord, shall we strike with the sword?]. Then they came. [Jn. 18:4-9 Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not

one]. [then they] laid hands on Jesus and took him. And one of those with Jesus [Jn. 18 Simon Peter] stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear [Jn. 18 his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus]. Then said Jesus to him: [No more of this Lk. 22:51] Put away your sword into its place, [into its sheath, Jn. 18] for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now, send me more than twelve legions of Angels? [Jn. 18:11 The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?] [Lk. 22:51 And he touched his ear and healed him]. But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way? In that hour Jesus said to the mob: Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me. [Lk. 22 But this is your hour, and the power of darkness]. But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him and fled. [Lk. 22 And they seized him and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed from a distance]".

26:52 *Then said Jesus to him: Put away your sword into its place*- When Peter speaks of how the Lord Jesus will 'turn away' sinners from their sins (Acts 3:26), he is using the very word of how the Lord Jesus told him to "put up again" his sword (Mt. 26:52), thereby turning Peter away from his sin. Whether Peter's allusion was conscious or unconscious isn't clear; we tend to use language which has recently been used to us even in other contexts, especially if we have meditated upon it and feel it personally relevant to us. Again we see that Peter's appeal to Israel to repent in Acts 2 and 3 was so successful because it was shot through with reference to his own failures and experience of repentance, conversion and forgiveness. Peter's appeal for repentance and conversion was evidently allusive to his own experience of conversion (Lk. 22:32 cp. Acts 3:19; 9:35). In this he was following the pattern of David, who sung his 'Maschil' (teaching) psalms after his forgiveness in order to convert sinners unto Yahweh (Ps. 51:13). Like Peter, David did so with his sin ever before him, with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:3,17). He invited them to seek forgiveness for their denial of their Lord, just as he had done. He dearly wished them to follow his pattern, and know the grace he now did. The same word used of how Judas "brought again" his pieces of silver to the Jews (27:3). This is part of a series of similarities between Judas and Peter at this time. They both in essence did the same thing, but Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace, whereas Judas didn't know the Lord's grace.

For all that take the sword- Peter was the one who had literally just put forth his hand and taken a sword (:51). So it was by grace that he didn't "perish" by the sword at this time. Again, we see how grace ran through the Lord's actions at this His greatest moment of personal stress. The same word *lambano*, "take", is used of how Judas had 'received' a band of

men armed with swords in order to capture Jesus (Jn. 18:3). Again, the similarities are being developed between Peter and Judas; both in essence made the same mistakes and committed the same sins, in this case, taking the sword. But Peter repented and trusted in the Lord's grace.

Shall perish with the sword- Not particularly in this life, but at judgment day, because "perish" is repeatedly used about final condemnation (e.g. 5:29,30; 10:28,39; 16:25; 22:7). The word is specifically used of the 'perishing' of Judas (Jn. 17:12, AV "lost"; 18:9). Again, the warning to Peter was not to be like Judas, even though the similarities between them were great at this time.

Jn. 18:11 adds: "The cup which My Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?". If Peter had entered into the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning the cup, then he wouldn't have made this mistake of attempting violent resistance. But he fell asleep, and as with us so often, failure or laziness at one point leads to failure in others later on.

26:53 *Do you think I cannot ask my Father and He shall, even now*- The word "now" is all significant. Even then, the Lord could have changed the nature and sequence of events which lay ahead of Him, and this possibility was uppermost in His mind, the temptation He struggled with. This factor must be given due weight in seeking to understand His struggle in Gethsemane. It wasn't a case that He Himself didn't want to drink the cup, but the Father insisted He must, and therefore He resigned Himself to the Father's will. There was another way, indeed there were multiple ways forward. He could have called down legions of Angels. But He made the Father's will His own, He willingly agreed to do it, because He wanted to fulfil the Scriptures, to be obedient to them rather than merely bring about a neat correlation between them and events. He rose up from the final prayer in Gethsemane having committed Himself to do this, even though there were other options. So His willing giving of Himself over to death wasn't merely an iron-willed submission to the Father's will, in the spirit of 'islam' [submission]. Rather did He arise from the final prayer resolved to do the Father's will as His will, and this meant turning His back upon all the other possibilities before Him. This makes His decisions and death even more awesome, knowing that there could have been other legitimate ways to bring about the plan of salvation- indeed, it could be argued that God's hands were not tied, and He could forgive and save who He wished with no requirement for the cross. But the cross was powerful in order to persuade others of the need to respond to it, and therefore the Lord died as He did for our sakes, in order to persuade us. And we should therefore allow the cross its full and maximum persuasive power in our lives. See on :28 *The new testament*.

Send me more than twelve legions of Angels?- But the Lord had learnt the lesson of Elisha, who could have himself seen legions of Angels but chose

not to, so certain was he that they were potentially there (2 Kings 6:17). "Give Me", *paristemi*, has a wide range of meaning, and it is used of how Peter was one of those who "stood by" the Lord in Gethsemane (Mk. 14:47); the Lord is saying that as Peter stood by Him with drawn sword, just one man against so many, so in fact there were legions of Angels standing by or 'given' to assist the Lord; but He was not going to make use of them. The same word is used of the officers who "stood by" Jesus and struck Him at His trial (Jn. 18:22; Acts 4:26 s.w.); the Lord must have reflected that actually there were legions of Angels standing by / given unto Him. His self-restraint in not using them is remarkable, and highlights the way in which His life was not taken from Him but He willingly gave it. The reference to "twelve" legions of Angels was perhaps therefore in contrast with the twelve disciples; even if all twelve of them had stood up to fight for the Lord's deliverance, actually He had not twelve men, but twelve *legions* of Angels at His disposal. But He was not going to use them, and so He would not make use of the twelve disciples. The use of "legions" naturally contrasts with the Roman legions who were ultimately going to be used by the Jews to destroy the Lord. Peter's letters are absolutely full of his reflections upon these incidents, and this is why he could write of how the Angels are not subject unto the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 3:22).

The Lord Jesus could've called upon legions of Angels to help Him; but He chose not to (Mt. 26:53); He could have taken power there and then in His ministry and declared Himself King- but He walked off to the hills instead (Jn. 6:15). In these examples we see what we could call a renunciation of power. Time and again we are called upon to decide whether we will renounce what power we have, or use it or abuse it for our own selfish ends. A parent faces this issue so often with a young child. The parent has more power; but how and for what reasons should she / he use that power? We can use 'power' in many ways in the trivia of daily life; but actually in most of those micro level decisions we are challenged with a choice as to what level of spirituality and unselfishness we are going to show.

26:54 *But how then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?*- See on :42 *Your will be done*. The Father was willing to allow another way- legions of Angels could have been sent to change the course of events. In this lay the intensity of the temptation, and the height of the Lord's achievement in rising up to the highest level. Scriptural prophecy has all kinds of possible fulfilments, as we noted in discussing the Olivet prophecy. There is not only one possible fulfilment. I suggest therefore that the Lord saw the Scriptures as speaking to Him by way of personal commandment, and He knew that to fulfil them was to obey them. To be disobedient to those Scriptures would not have falsified them, because another way of fulfilment could have been found. But the

Lord felt strongly the need to make the word become flesh to utter fullness and perfection.

26:55 *In that hour Jesus said to the mob*- The size of the crowd of armed men is an indirect indication of the fierce loyalty of the eleven disciples to the Lord. Judas expected that they would or at least could put up major resistance.

Have you come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me?- The same word used about Jesus and the disciples 'going out' from the Upper Room to Gethsemane (:30; Jn. 18:1), and Jesus 'going forth' to meet the crowd of armed men (Jn. 18:4). The impression is given of a head on meeting between the forces of light and darkness.

I sat daily in the temple teaching and you did not take me- The Lord was addressing the leadership of the group, who had sat daily in the temple over the past week and heard Him. They knew what He looked like, He had sat *pros humas,* "with you" (AV), not so much "with you" as 'directly facing you', sitting down in front of them and therefore at close range. Therefore the need for Judas to identify the Lord with a kiss, to prove "that same is He", was because the mass of armed men didn't know who He was, and had therefore not sat in the temple. Again we see the Lord recognizing that men are only who they are, the hired thugs were no more than hired thugs acting in ignorance; but the leaders who were present were the ones He wanted to address. This is confirmed by Lk. 22:52 stating that "Jesus said to the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders that had come against him: Have you come as against a robber, with swords and staves?". The priests and elders were in that large crowd, and the Lord directly addresses them. So although He addressed "the multitudes", His message was aimed at specific individuals within the crowd. This is true of much of Scripture; perhaps those parts we personally fail to understand are speaking to a particular group in need of that message, perhaps in a previous age, and it may not be as directly intended for us as it was to them. The correspondence between the narratives is detailed and deeply credible. Uninspired writers would surely not only contradict themselves, but lack this artless congruence between each other which we find in the inspired Gospel records. Lk. 22:53 adds that the Lord continued to say: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness". The sense is surely that in broad daylight they dared not lay hold on Him- they had to do it under cover of darkness, because they were of the darkness.

26:56 *But all this is happening so that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled*- This can be read as part of the Lord's words, or the comment of Matthew. "Is happening" is translated "was done" in the AV. See on :54; the emphasis upon the fulfilment of Scripture is not merely noting a correspondence between New Testament event and Old

Testament scripture. Rather I suggest is the idea that the Lord chose to be obedient to God's word and will, to make it His own, to the highest possible extent, to the point of total personal identification with it; when by its nature, God's prophetic word has various possibilities of fulfilments on different levels, some of which would have enabled the Lord to bypass the cross. The specific reference may be to Ps. 31:11. This refers to how David's family appear to have later disowned him during Saul's persecution, fleeing from him, as the Lord's friends also did.

John inserts at this point that the Lord was revealed in glory and the crowd of armed men fell to the ground; He asked them to let the disciples "go their way". And yet He had earlier lamented that their scattering from Him would be related to their lack of faith: "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written: I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad". This has to be compared with John's account in Jn. 18:4-9: "Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them). When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way- that the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one". The scattering from the Lord was part of their falling away. And yet the Lord sets them up to flee, he apparently urges them to do so, in order that He would not spiritually lose any of them. We see here a profound principle- that there are times when it would be better to allow disciples to follow a lower principle, to even fail, to run away from the highest principle of dying with Christ; lest otherwise the height of the demand means they become lost totally. The church of my youth forbad divorce and remarriage, and yet by forcing disciples who divorced to never remarry, they ended up causing many of them to be lost to Christ's cause. And there are multiple other examples.

Then all the disciples left him- Although the Lord had set up the opportunity for them to flee by stunning the armed men and telling them to allow the disciples free exit, they were still forsaking Him by doing so. And it still hurt the Lord. He simply knew their spiritual capabilities, and was giving them a lower level escape route. One size simply doesn't fit all; He didn't deal with them on a legalistic level of demanding obedience to a certain standard, failing which they were rejected. Neither does He work like that today. Their forsaking of Him sets the scene for His final agonized cry to the Father: "Why have *You* forsaken Me?" (27:46). His disciples had, the inner circle of ministering women and His own mother had walked away from the cross- and now He felt even the Father forsaking Him, despite earlier having said that "He that sent Me is with Me: the Father has not left Me alone [s.w. 'forsake']" (Jn. 8:29).

And fled- Their action is emphasized by the usage of both words, forsake and fled. Typically the Gospel writers emphasize their own weakness and failures, all as part of their compelling appeal to others to respond to the message they themselves had been so slow to grasp.

26:57 *And they that had taken Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes*- There is great emphasis on the Lord being *led* (Mt. 26:57; 27:2,31; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:13,28; 19:16). And notice how Acts 8:32 changes the quotation from Is. 53 to say that Christ was *led* (this isn't in the Hebrew text). His passivity is another indication that He was *giving* His life of His own volition, it wasn't being taken from Him.

And the elders- Sometimes a technical term for the Sanhedrin.

Were gathered together- This word is often used in connection with the Lord's opponents being gathered together against Him at His death (Mt. 26:3,57; 27:17,27,62; 28:12; Lk. 22:66; Acts 4:26,27); and yet it is also used of the gathering together of the faithful, especially at the breaking of bread, around the symbols of the Lord's death (Acts 20:7,8; 1 Cor. 5:4). The cross becomes the essence of the division between the believers and the world; each group gather together around it. The cross and the person of the Lord Jesus therefore divide the believer from the world; and this is where the line really is, rather than between believer and believer. To make the breaking of bread service and the emblems of the crucified Jesus the means of dividing between believers is therefore extremely serious; at best, it totally fails to perceive the intention of the Lord Jesus and His death. His suffering, He there in His time of torture, is intended to be the focal point of the gathering together of the believers for Him, and likewise it becomes the focal point of the unbelieving world's gathering together against Him.

26:58 *But Peter followed Him afar off*- This is recorded in the same words by all three Synoptics. It impressed them all as perhaps typical of so much of their 'following' the Lord; it was a following, but far off from Him. His challenge to Peter had been to not just physically follow Him, but to pick up His cross and walk behind Him on His way to His cross (16:24 s.w.). Following Jesus in the shadows and avoiding identification with Him was hardly the kind of following which He intended. Yet Peter recognized this, because his appeal for repentance describes his audience as likewise "afar off" (Acts 2:39 s.w.); he is asking them to make the conversion which he did, and he thereby considers his 'following afar off' as not really following at all, and being in a 'far off from Christ' position from which he repented and thereby 'came near' to Christ in conversion. The Greek words for 'followed' and 'afar off' are also used about how the few remaining disciples stood 'afar off' from Christ on the cross. The sense is perhaps that the Gospel writers recognized how far they were from co-crucifixion with Christ, and this sense is one we can identify with. And we

are those likewise described in Ephesians as “far off” as Peter was, but are now likewise reconciled.

To the court of the high priest; and entered in- The same word used by the Lord in warning Peter not to "enter into" temptation (Lk. 22:46). And it is used again of how Satan entered into Judas (Jn. 13:27), again drawing a parallel between the path of both Peter and Judas- the difference finally being simply that Peter believed in the Lord's grace whereas Judas could not.

And sat with the officers- The presence of the definite article suggests that "the servants" [the Greek also means "officers"] are a group which has already been mentioned, and surely they are the "servants" who comprised the crowd of armed men who arrested Jesus in the Garden. The same word is used three times about them in Jn. 18:3,12,18. The risk Peter was taking was considerable, seeing he had visibly been with the Lord in the Garden and had tried to kill one of the servants. We must give due weight to this- his devotion to his Lord was incomplete but all the same must be recognized for what it was as far as it was. So often those who aim higher than others in their spiritual devotions are those who fall the most publicly, and yet their devotion to their Lord should not be forgotten- for it is higher than the mass of other disciples.

To see the end- Critically, we could say that the Lord had called His men to participate in His "end", to die with Him, to carry His cross, and Peter (like us) wished merely to observe His end, rather than participate in it personally. I have thought the same about myself often in self-examination at the breaking of bread. And yet Peter's love for the Lord cannot be questioned, for it was not mere curiosity that led him to take the risk he did of sitting amongst "the servants". The only other time the Greek phrase occurs is in James 5:11, where James says we have all seen the end of the Lord [the Lord Jesus?], that He is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Writing as James was in the context of an early church led by Peter, it is not impossible that he is hinting that we are all in the place of Peter, and have an experience of pity and tender mercy none less than he experienced.

26:59 *Now the chief priests and the whole council*- Gk. 'the Sanhedrin'. All of them participated in desiring or requiring [Gk.; AV "sought"] false witness against Jesus. And yet within that group was Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (Jn. 3:1- and "all" the Jewish leaders condemned Jesus to death, 27:1); and Joseph, who is specifically called a member of the Council (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:50). Perhaps this is an example of where "all" is used in Biblical languages in a general but not strictly literal sense. Lk. 23:51 says that Joseph had not "consented" with the Council. The Greek can mean specifically to vote, but also to simply 'agree'. Perhaps he voted against their decision; or perhaps his lack of consent was deeply internal.

In any case, it seems that it was only after the Lord was pronounced dead that he 'came out' publicly in open identification with the Lord (note "after this...", Jn. 19:38). We see here the grace of God, in not holding against those men the way that they passively went along with the decision to crucify God's Son. Their strong internal disagreement was noted. We are reminded of how not all Joseph's brothers went along with the plan to kill him, but their silence meant that the plan went ahead. We likewise should show grace to those who go along with decisions which are deeply wrong and hurtful. This is not to say that they were correct in their lack of commitment, but we may well have done the same. And we can take a lesson from the Father's gracious attitude to those who would not immediately stand up and be counted for the Lord's cause. This affects our decision making in terms of disciplining those who do things like responding to military call up, voting under duress or other things which are against the Lord's will, which are failures... and yet ultimately God may very well extend the same grace to them as He did to Joseph and Nicodemus. And He tends to use circumstances to make a person finally come out in the open about their views, because secret discipleship is an oxymoron and His desire is that we are as a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

Sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death- The word is only used elsewhere in the Gospels about the way that the faithful will experience being 'put to death' in the final tribulation (10:21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 21:16). The sufferings of the tribulation will enable the last generation to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and thus to share His resurrection life.

26:60 *And they did not find any, though many false witnesses came*- This is twice emphasized in this verse. Yet there were many false witnesses made. Presumably their legalistic minds insisted on giving the Lord 'a fair trial'; part of their minds were clouded by hatred and wickedness, and yet another part of their minds was set on strict legalistic obedience to God and the principles of legal integrity. In this we see the schizophrenic nature of the human mind. No matter what heights of devotion and understanding we may reach, we can never assume that we are totally with the Lord. And likewise we should not assume that others are either perfectly, totally spiritual or totally unspiritual. Sadly the human mind is capable of operating in different directions at once.

But afterwards came two- The semblance of legal integrity they were following required that at least two and preferably three witnesses made the same accusation. The legalism of the Jews is emphasized, not least in their fear of ritual defilement at Passover time (Jn. 18:28). They held themselves to legal obedience and integrity, whilst committing the ultimate sin, of condemning the Son of God to a cruel death. The hatred they unleashed upon Him was done by men who were rigorously obedient

to commandments; their abuse of Him would therefore have been justified by them as some form of obedience to Divine principle. And this is why religious people can be the most abusive and cruel of any- if the principles they are wedded to are wrong, and if they have not perceived grace.

26:61 *And said: This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days*- They were misquoting Him, and their witness did not agree, each of the two men reported His words differently (Mk. 14:59). And this lack of agreement between witnesses, "many" of them, was what had delayed proceedings to this point. But finally these evil men gave up all semblance of legal integrity- for time was running out. They thus condemned themselves even by the legal standards they were holding themselves to. The technical reason for His death sentence, therefore, was a supposed plan to destroy the temple, to commit the ultimate sacrilege. But what the Lord had said was that *they* would destroy the temple, referring to Himself, but after three days He would raise it up (Jn. 2:19). It was in fact they and not Him who were guilty of the crime of destroying the temple; indeed, the literal temple was finally destroyed exactly because of them. They condemned Him for what they themselves were guilty of. Legalists are so often led by the Lord to positions wherein they condemn themselves by their own standards, words and demands. The trial of Jesus is the ultimate expose of legalism.

26:62 *And the high priest stood up and said to him*- As a judge arises to give the verdict.

Do you answer nothing?- One reason for the Lord's silence was in order to allow them to condemn themselves- see on :61. But His self-control at His trials caused marvel amongst those who observed it, and it should to us too. For when justice and truth are so obviously not being upheld, all that is within us as humans cries out against it. Campaigns against injustice always gather mass support- it's very much a part of our human nature. But the Lord in this context said nothing. He let the unjust condemn themselves.

What is it that these testify against you?- The Greek could equally be translated 'Who are these that these testify against you?'. We wonder whether one of them was Judas, and whether the other was some other former disciple. The High Priest's point would therefore have been 'Come on, these are Your own men who are testifying You said this. And you remain silent?'. The pain of betrayal would have been intense. Surely the deal with Judas had involved his being a legal witness at the trial. But the fact his witness did not agree with the other man’s witness showed yet again that their careful plans simply didn’t work out; see on :5. The Lord Jesus freely gave His life, rather than having it taken from Him by the working out of carefully laid clever plans. Those plans failed. But He gave

His life.

26:63 *But Jesus held His peace*- The High Priest 'answered' to this silence. Silence is itself a statement, a word. Is. 57:11 reasons with Israel that despite their sins, God had 'held His peace' in not judging them, and yet they still did not respect Him. Perhaps the Lord held His peace because all He could really speak in response was judgment against them. And He did not want to do that overmuch, He wanted to give them the maximum time for repentance before having to speak the inevitable judgment upon them. The answer He finally gives is not an answer to the accusations, but rather a pronouncement of judgment. And this is why, it seems to me, that He 'held His peace'- in order to give them the maximum opportunity to repent, and He was counting almost every second now. This desire for human repentance is a fundamental part of the Lord, as it should be part of our basic personality in Christ. This same Lord works moment by moment with us likewise, to bring us to repentance. This is His earnest desire.

And the high priest said to him: I bind you under oath to the living God, tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God- The technical reason for condemning Him was a supposed plot to destroy the temple building, but now the judge moves on to make another accusation, the issue which was most important to him and the Jews, but which was not of itself a criminal accusation which could be then transferred to Roman judgment with a request for a death penalty. But *contra* this there is the possibility that because Caesar declared himself to be the son of God and the anointed one, any man claiming to be that could be reported to the Romans and be condemned to death. In terms of legal procedure, their behaviour was wrong. The accusation shifted from one count to another, reflecting the clear desire of the judge to secure a condemnation regardless of procedure or witnesses. If this line of thought is correct, then it follows that confession of faith in any person as being "the Christ, the Son of God" was a criminal offence worthy of death. The crucifixion of the Lord for making this claim was therefore creating a legal precedent for the death by crucifixion of anyone else who believed there was such a person alive within the Roman empire. And the Gospels are studded with examples of confession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (16:16; Lk. 4:41; Jn. 6:69; 11:27). The whole intention of the Gospel records was to bring people to make that same profession of faith in "the Christ, the Son of God" (Mk. 1:1; Jn. 20:31). Those parchments and the rehearsing of them would therefore have been forbidden material. In our age it may appear painless to confess faith in "the Christ, the Son of God", but it is no less radical in the separation it requires from the spirit of the societies in which we live.

26:64 *Jesus said to him: You have said it; nevertheless I say to you, from this time forward*- "You have said" shows how again, the Lord sought to

elicit confessions from men in their own words.

You shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven- The allusion is clearly to Daniel's vision of the Son of Man coming in glory to judge the Gentile world. And the Lord is saying that those hyper religious Jews were effectively condemned Gentiles before God. But those men to whom He spoke died in their beds. Lifespans were short in first century Palestine, most males were dead by 40. Most of them wouldn't even have lived to experience the calamity of AD67-70. They will only therefore "see the Son of Man sitting..." at His return, when they are resurrected and see Him in His glory. And this will be of itself their condemnation- to see Him there enthroned in glory, and themselves not in His Kingdom. This was exactly His teaching to them in 23:39: "You shall not see Me from this time forward, until you shall say: Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord". They will then bless Him- but all too tragically late.

At His trial, the Lord warned them that He would come again as judge (Mt. 26:64,65), as if He realized that they were living out a foretaste of the final judgment. The thief likewise understood the Lord's presence as being the presence of the judge who would finally judge him (Lk. 23:44). Harry Whittaker points out that the cross divided men: there were women who followed and mourned insincerely, and the women who really followed. There were soldiers who gambled over the Lord's clothes, and one who really repented. There was a thief who repented and one who wouldn't. There were those who mocked and others who watched and believed.

26:65 *Then the high priest tore his garments, saying*- Declaring the end of his priesthood, to be replaced by the Lord Jesus. The Lord was crucified for blasphemy; this was the charge on which He was found guilty at His trial by the Jews, and the basis upon which they demanded His crucifixion. The Mishnah claims that this was only possible if someone actually used the Yahweh Name. *Sanhedrin* 7.5 outlines the protocol for condemning someone for this, in terms which have accurate correspondence with the Lord's trial: "The blasphemer is not guilty until he have expressly uttered the Name... When the trial is over... the judges stand up and rend their clothes" (Quoted in F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame (*Grand Rapids: Eerdmans*,* 1995 ed.), p. 53). So when the Lord responded to their question as to His Messiahship by saying "I am", and went on to appropriate the Messianic words of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 110:1 to Himself, He must have explicitly used the Yahweh Name about Himself. This is why they were so quick to accuse Him of blasphemy, and why the High Priest rent his clothes. The Lord died because He declared the Yahweh Name, unashamedly, knowing that His declaration of it would take Him to the cross. Our declaration of the essence of Yahweh, by

truthfulness, forgiveness... this may cost us, although maybe not so dearly. Yet we can be inspired by the Lord's example.

He has spoken blasphemy. What further need have we of witnesses? You have now heard the blasphemy- Again, legal procedure, which they had tried so carefully to follow, was made a mockery of. They began with a conviction of plotting to destroy the temple buildings, then turned that into an accusation that He was a "Christ, the Son of God", a rival to Caesar; and now they jump on the charge of blasphemy, for which they gave Him the death penalty. And yet the Jews had no legal power to execute people; they had to present their case to the Roman authorities. And blasphemy was not a capital offence under Roman law. Their careful attempts to follow legal integrity broke down in pathetic collapse, and thereby they condemned themselves. The same word, *blasphemeo*, is then used of how the Jews "reviled" or blasphemed the Lord as He hung on the cross (27:39; Lk. 22:65). They had earlier accused the Lord of blasphemy at least twice during His ministry (Mt. 9:3; Jn. 10:36 s.w.). So they should have thought of that earlier in the trial, seeing they themselves were the witnesses of that supposed crime. We are left with the impression of a judge and jury increasingly desperate to find the Lord guilty, progressively throwing their integrity and legalism to the winds in their obsession to make Him guilty of death. Little wonder that Pilate later remonstrated with them that Jesus was simply not legally guilty of any capital offence. But the more he made that point to them, the more they screamed for His death.

26:66 *What is your judgement? They answered and said*- No note is made of Joseph or Nicodemus speaking out against it. The mob ruled, despite all the appearances of jurisprudence, spiritual and legal integrity. And yet the record speaks so positively of those two men. Perhaps this is because the Gospel records were encouraging those who had offered a pinch of incense to Caesar, or in some other way been silent in the Roman world when they should have stood up and been counted, that God's grace was still with them- even though ultimately, providence tends to overrule circumstances so that we do have to stand up openly.

He is worthy of death- The Lord had earlier taught that whoever calls their brother 'Raca', worthless, would be "guilty" [s.w.] before "the Council", the Sanhedrin (5:21,22). He had in mind that the Sanhedrin of the Jews was not the ultimate court of judgment for God's people, but rather the Heavenly council of Angels, presided over by God Almighty. The Lord must surely have been aware of this as the men of that human Sanhedrin condemned and abused Him. Human committees, courts or even groups of friends and family members are not the ultimate Sanhedrin; judge us as they may, the ultimate court is in Heaven. The same word for "guilty" is found in 1 Cor. 11:27, where Paul urges us to self-examination at the Lord's table lest we be guilty of His body and

blood. The allusion shows that we as baptized believers can be no better than those evil men- unless we perceive Him and His death for what they really are.

26:67- see on :39.
Then they spat in His face and beat Him with their fists- This was done by men who just minutes beforehand had been carefully upholding some isolated principles of Divine law and general legal integrity. Their appearance of culture vanished. They only could have been so crude and cruel if they first justified it in terms of their religion; spitting and beating would have been justified by them as the punishment due to a heretic. But here we see how they were justifying their own natural anger and jealousy by taking a tiny shard of Biblical precedent- for only in Dt. 25:2 do we have any justification for legal beating, and once it was finished, then there was to be no other punishment. The beating was to be on his back and not on his face; and there was no talk of spitting. But the Jews took that and used it to justify spitting in the Lord's *face*, beating Him with their fists and then further condemning Him to death. The only command to spit in the face of a man was if he refused to raise up children for his dead relative (Dt. 25:9); but this was totally irrelevant to the Lord Jesus. He in any case was the ultimate example of a man who did build up His Father's house. There is anger in each of us, and religious people at times give full vent to that anger by justifying it as righteous anger, grabbing hold of the vague implication of some Bible verse and taking it way beyond the obvious meaning of the verse. In doing so, they are behaving no better than these the very worst of men who have ever lived, committing the worst ever crime ever committed in the cosmos. The face of Jesus shone at times with God's glory; He was the face of God to men. And they spat in that face, and beat it. The wonder was that the Lord had specifically foreseen this- He had predicted that they would spit at Him (Mk. 10:34). He foresaw how they would fuel their anger against Him with their persuasion that He was a heretic.

And some slapped Him with the palms of their hands- A Semitic insult to a heretic. Again, their anger was fuelled by and excused by their religious convictions. This slapping (whilst He was blindfolded, Lk. 22:64) was connected to their question: "Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?" (:68). Clearly they were seeking to test His claim to be the Christ. They thought that the Christ could demonstrate supernatural knowledge; and He had already demonstrated that multiple times. They clearly had in mind a section from the uninspired Psalms of Solomon, where false Messiahs were to be tested in this way. The warning to us is to never allow fragments of Scripture or our religious tradition or beloved writings to justify us in expressing our anger in this way.

26:68 *Saying: Prophesy to us, you Christ! Who is he that struck you?*- They had blindfolded Him, and were challenging Him to exercise the

prophetic gift of discernment by saying the name of the soldier who had struck Him. We note that 'prophesy' is not to be understood solely as the prediction of future events. The fact is, the Lord did know who had struck Him. They were clearly alluding to the fact that the Jews had concluded the Lord was a false prophet and false Christ and were punishing Him as such.

26:69

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Accusation 1	Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a maid came to him, saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean.	And as Peter was downstairs in the courtyard, there came one of the maids of the high priest. And seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said: You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus!	And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire and looking earnestly upon him, said: This man also was with him.	Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest. But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door. The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples?
Denial 1	But he denied before them all, saying: I	But he denied it, saying: I neither know, nor	But he denied it, saying: Woman, I do not know him.	He said: I am not!

	do not know what you say.	understand what you say; and he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.		
Accusation 2	And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him and said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.	And the maid saw him and began again to say to them that stood by: This is one of them!	And after a little while another person saw him and said: You also are one of them.	Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself... Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples?
Denial 2	And again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man.	But he again denied it.	But Peter said: Man, I am not.	He denied and said: I am not!
Accusation 3	And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter: Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect	And after a little while, again they that stood by said to Peter: Of a truth you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.	And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying: Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean.	One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?

	makes you known.			
Denial 3	Then he began to curse and to swear: I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed.	But he began to curse and to swear under oath: I do not know this man of whom you speak. And immediately the second time the cock crew	But Peter said: Man, I do not know what you say. And immediately, as he spoke, the cock crew.	Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew.
Peter's response 1	And Peter remembered the words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times.	And Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny me three times.	And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord that he had said to him: Before the cock crow this day, you shall deny me three times.	
Peter goes out	And he went out and wept bitterly.	And as he thought upon it, he wept.	And he went out and wept bitterly.	

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard- But likely within earshot. "Outside" translates *exo*, and the idea of being 'outside' from the Lord Jesus, especially in the context of Him being in a court, is exactly the picture of the rejected- Jesus at the day of judgment, with the rejected 'outside', away from Him. The term is used of the rejected being "cast out" (5:13), the rejected 'standing without' seeking entrance with the door closed (Lk. 13:25), the Jews "thrust out" of the Kingdom (Lk. 13:28), saltless salt 'cast without' (Lk. 14:35), the rejected 'cast out' (Jn. 6:37; 15:6). The word is used again to describe how Peter finally "went out[side]" into the final darkness (:75). He was living out the very picture of condemnation. We too can sin and be condemned in this life, yet the verdict can be changed. And that explains the intensity of zeal and desire in responding to such grace with all our hearts. If we do not perceive our condemnation nor the gracious change of verdict, there can be no real

flame of zeal in response, no true humility, no deep seated motivation to service, forgiveness and grace to others.

And a maid- Gk. 'a servant girl', "one of the servant girls of the High Priest" (Mk. 14:66). Her claim that "You also were with Jesus" may specifically refer to Peter's presence with Jesus in Gethsemane, for" the servants" of the High Priest had been there. Perhaps she was one of them. She describes Peter as being *meta* Jesus ["you were with Jesus"], and the same phrase *meta* Jesus is used to described the disciples being *meta* Jesus in Gethsemane (:36,51). Or since the Lord was a public figure in Jerusalem, it would be likely that Peter was known as one of those ever to be seen hanging around Him. Jn. 18:17 gives further information about her: "The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!". The only other time we read of a servant girl who was a door keeper is in Acts 12:16, where the servant girl [s.w.] called Rhoda was the door keeper at the home of the disciples in Jerusalem, and is thrilled when she realizes that it is Peter knocking at the door asking her to let him in. Note that "door keeper" is likely a technical term, a kind of profession. This heightens the similarity between the two characters. The similarities with the scene in Jn. 18:17 are too strong to be passed off as unintentional; for here Peter has to have the door to the courtyard opened by the servant girl, and it is at the gate that she recognizes him. Peter's failure, his denials, were the basis of his successful appeals for Israel to follow his pattern of repentance. Thousands heard him make those appeals in Jerusalem, for if a few thousand were baptized in one day, we can be sure that many others heard the message and didn't act upon it. It's highly likely that that servant girl was in the crowd, and was one who responded. I suggest that Rhoda was that servant girl, converted by Peter's failure, repentance and experience of forgiveness. She converted from serving the Jewish High Priest to serving the Heavenly High Priest, the Lord Jesus; from being one of the crowd who went out to arrest Jesus, to being one who glorified His resurrection.

Came to him- Jn. 18:17 says that the girl was keeping the door and let Peter through. As the door keeper she would have looked carefully at his face in the light of a torch. And then she came to him as he was sitting by the fire (Lk.), say some minutes later, as she realized who he was. This again has the ring of congruence about it, indicating how perfectly the records dovetail.

Saying: You also were with Jesus the Galilean- Another passing evidence of the Lord's utter humanity; He spoke like a Galilean and was clearly a man brought up there, and not a pre-existent Divine being that came to earth.

26:70 *But he denied before them all, saying*- Again, Peter was living out the scene of condemnation at the last day, where the verdict likewise will be manifest "before all". The Lord had used the same word in saying that whoever denied Him "before men" [cp. "before all"], He will deny before the Father at the last day (10:33). Peter appealed for Israel to repent on the basis that they had "denied" Christ (Acts 3:13,14 s.w.)- he is appealing for them to realize that they had done what he had done, and yet they could repent, convert and experience the same grace he had done. His appeal, made a stone's throw from where the denials were made and only 6 weeks later, was therefore so powerful. Peter likewise used his failure in his pastoral work with his converts, warning them that to even deny the Lord who redeemed us is the worst possible thing we can do (2 Pet. 2:1). Likewise 1 Jn. 2:22,23 speaks of denying Christ as being the characteristic of the AntiChrist. And John wrote in the context of the early church having Peter as its first leader, and John of course was fully aware of Peter's failure that night.

Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned. There is a passage in Proverbs 24:11,12 which has a strange relevance to Peter's self-condemnation. Having spoken of those being led away to death (the very context of Peter's denial), we read: "If thou sayest, Behold we know not this man: doth not he that weigheth the hearts consider it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?". This last phrase is quoted in Rev. 22:12 about the final judgment. Paul seems to consciously link Peter's church hypocrisy and legalism with his earlier denials that he had ever known the Lord Jesus. He writes of how he had to reveal Peter's denial of the Lord's grace "before them all" (Gal. 2:14), using the very same Greek phrase of Mt. 26:70, where "before them all" Peter made the same essential denial.

I do not know what you say- Again, Peter was acting as the condemned, to whom the Lord will say "I know you not" (25:12; Lk. 13:25). The whole idea of 'I don't know Him' must, sadly, be connected with the Lord's words in Mt. 7:23 and 25:41, where He tells the rejected: "I never knew you". By denying knowledge of the Saviour, Peter was effectively agreeing that the verdict of condemnation could appropriately be passed upon him. In one of his many allusions to the Gospels, Paul wrote that "If we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). Peter in this life denied his Lord *in front of men* (Mt. 26:70)- and the record of his failure intentionally looks back to the Lord's warning that whoever denies Him *before men* will be denied by Him at judgment day (Mt. 10:33). He sinned, and in the court of Heaven was condemned; and yet he could change the verdict by repentance.

26:71 *And when he went out to the entrance, another maid saw him*- John says that a group of men made the second accusation; see the parallel texts at the commentary on :69. Luke says that Peter replied to the second accusation [which Matthew says was made by a *woman*] by saying "*Man*, I am not". Clearly the accusations and denials were in groups- the second 'denial' involved a number of people [a man, a woman and plural men] making accusations and Peter denying them all. If we put together the various records of Peter's three denials, it seems clear that a number of accusations were made, and he replied slightly differently each time. But there were three groups of accusations and denials. We can imagine the scene- there was a whole group of men and women present, all within earshot, and once one person made the accusation, others would've chimed in. But the account is stylized to group the denials in three groups, and Peter obviously perceived this after his final oath of denial. But in fact it seems that each denial was a series of separate denials. Indeed the tense of the verb "denied" in :70 suggests he kept on and on denying.

And said to the bystanders: This man was with Jesus of Nazareth- Peter overheard her talking to the men about him, and jumped in with a denial (:72). This is absolutely psychologically credible. By "with Jesus" she meant, 'There in the Garden', for *meta* Jesus is how the disciples are described there. See on :69 *A maid*.

26:72 *And again he denied with an oath*- Not an expletive, but rather a Jewish oath. Many of them wished condemnation on the person making the oath if it were not true. Again, Peter is entering into condemnation, signing himself up for condemnation. James wrote to the very early church, probably to the Jerusalem ecclesia, who were clearly led by Peter. He urged them "Above all things, my brethren, swear not… neither by any other oath" (James 5:12). He was clearly saying, in effect: 'Don't be like Peter'. The weakness of Peter, and the way he had repented and been forgiven, was the basis of his success as a preacher and also of his special commission to feed the lambs of the early flock. He did not present himself as the flawless pastor, and neither did his fellow elders like James present him as such. But as with his Lord, it was his humanity which was the basis of his exaltation.

I do not know- See on :70 *I know not.*

The man- As if he didn't even know Jesus' name. He protested too much, for Jesus was a well known public figure in Jerusalem at the time (Lk. 24:18,19).

26:73 *And after a little while*- Luke says it was after an hour.

They that stood by came and said to Peter- Luke says it was one individual who made the third accusation, and John says it was

specifically a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off. The three episodes of accusation and denial were therefore each comprised of a series of accusations and a series of denials. See on :71 *Another maid*. This means that the Lord was being generous in saying that Peter would deny Him three times before the cock crowed. Each episode of denial contained many separate denials.

Of a truth you also are one of them, for your dialect makes you known- This implies that the band of disciples were perceived as a group of Galileans. Matthew has earlier recorded the first accusation as being that "You also were with Jesus the Galilean". Mark is explicit that they now said: "You are a Galilean". And Luke records the statement of their simplistic logic: "Of a truth, this man also was with him. For he is a Galilean". The fact Jesus was a Galilean and Peter was clearly a Galilean didn't, surely, have to mean that therefore Peter had to have been with Jesus as one of His disciples. But their reasoning shows to what extent they perceived Jesus and His followers to be all from Galilee. Remember that Galilee was despised as the most backward and least spiritually 'Jewish' of all of Palestine; their accent was noted and perceived as harsh and crude, full of grammatical mistakes. But it was from the larynx of a Galilean Jew that there came the words of God Almighty, clothed as they were in the country accent and provincial style which was so despised. Christianity began as a peasant religion, a group of men perceived as simpletons. And it is in such communities or those perceived as such that the true spirit of Christ has often prospered most. Christianity has become a culture, and often the culture of the Western wealthy. But that is not at all how it began, and 'Christianity as culture', merely following the faith of our fathers, churchianity, is not the real, raw Christianity of Jesus and His Galileans.

26:74 *Then he began*- The implication could be that he began to call down the curses of eternal condemnation and rejection at judgment day upon himself, but the crowing of the rooster made him stop.

To curse- Not with expletives, but a declaration of himself as anathema to God and Messiah if he was on the side of Jesus. The Greek *kata-anathematizo* means just that; to declare oneself anathema, to exclude oneself from the body of God's people.

And to swear- Peter was in total disobedience to the Lord's teaching: "Swear not at all" (5:34,36 s.w.). See on 26:72 *With an oath*.

I do not know the man! And immediately the cock crowed- See on :70 *I know not.*

26:75 *And Peter remembered*- The letters of Peter urge his readers to "be mindful of the words which were spoken before" (2 Pet. 3:2). Yet this is evidently alluding to the frequent references to the disciples being slow to

"remember" [s.w. "mindful"] the words which their Lord had "spoken before" (Lk. 24:6,8; Jn. 2:17,22; 12:16). Indeed, the same word is used about Peter 'remembering' [s.w. "be mindful"] all too late, the words which his Lord had "spoken before" to him (Mt. 26:75). So Peter was aware that his readers knew that he had not 'remembered' the words his Lord had "spoken before" to *him*- and yet, knowing that, he exhorts his readers to 'remember' or 'be mindful' [s.w.] of words which had been previously spoken. His readers likely had memorized the Gospels by heart. And yet Peter asks them to learn from his mistake, not to be as slow to remember as the disciples had been, and he especially. This is the basis of powerful exhortation- a repentant life, not an appearance of sinlessness.

Mk. 14:72 adds that Peter "thought thereon", using the Greek word usually translated 'to lay hands upon'. We can hear the Lord's word but not really engage with it. This in fact is likely the status of so much of God's word which we have read, heard and stashed away in our memory cells. We heard it, we are reminded of it as Peter was by the first cock crow after the first denial episode, but we fail to lay hands on it, to bring it to mind ['remember' it], to engage with it until it is paramount in our consciousness.

The words which Jesus had said: Before the cock crows- The problem is that Mark says that the cock crowed after the first denial; and it is Mark who says that the Lord's warning was that "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Matthew and the others seem to speak of only one cock crow. There are various solutions. One is that we give full weight to the fact we are dealing with three episodes or groups of denials- see on :71*Another maid*. If the first 'denial' involved three separate denials, then this fulfilled the prediction that there would be three denials before the cock crew. And the third episode of denials occurred before the second cock crow, this fulfilling the Lord's word as recorded by Mark "Before the cock crows *twice*, you shall deny Me three times". Another is to go with the NIV footnotes on Mk. 14:30,72, which claim that earliest manuscripts omit the word "twice" and "second time". Another textual approach is to reflect that the record of the cock crowing after the first denial (Mk. 14:68) is omitted by most later translations after the AV. The text also could be suspect at that point. But I am distinctly uneasy at resolving apparent difficulties by claiming that verses are spurious and uninspired. Issues of translation, however, are of another order. I submit that Mk. 14:72 is capable of another translation. Most versions have to the effect that "Before the cock crows twice, you shall deny Me three times". But it could equally be translated 'You shall deny Me three times for each two crows of the cock'. This would make a total of six denials. I believe I established beyond doubt in commenting on :71 *Another maid* that there were multiple denials by Peter. I suggest therefore that there were three denials from Peter during the first denial episode, before

the first crowing of the cock; then another one or two denials during the second denial episode, and then another one or two during the third denial episode- and then the cock crew a second time. Another possible reconstruction was offered by Michael Cortright:

First denial:
A girl at the door to the courtyard (John 18:17).
Second denial:
A servant girl, by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:69, Mark 14:66, Luke 22:56).
Third denial:
A man by the fire in the courtyard (Luke 22:58).
First crow.
Mark 14:68 (King James Version).
Fourth denial:
Another girl, at the gateway (Matthew 26:71) or entryway (Mark 14:68,69).
Fifth denial:
Some anonymous (standing) people by the fire in the courtyard (Matthew 26:73, Mark 14:70, John 18:25).
Sixth denial:
Another man who happens to be a male servant of the high priest (Luke 22:59, John 18:26).
Second crow.
Matthew 26:74, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:60, John 18:27.

You shall deny me three times- Pliny records how Christians were asked to make a threefold denial of Christ (*Epistles* 10.97). It has been suggested that the account of Peter's threefold denials of Christ has been included in the Gospel records as an encouragement to those whose faith failed them that still there was a way back to restoration with the Lord Jesus, just as there had been for Peter. When Peter encourages his persecuted brethren to resist the "roaring lion" of Roman / Jewish persecution (1 Pet. 5:8), he is therefore to be seen as writing against a background in which he had actually failed the very test which his brethren were facing. Yet he can therefore even more powerfully encouraged them, because he had also experienced the Lord's restoring grace.

And he went out and wept bitterly- There are connections between Peter's position at this time and that of the rejected before the judgment seat. His bitter weeping connects most obviously with the weeping and gnashing of teeth of the rejected. He was 'remaining outside' of the Palace where the Lord was (Mt. 26:29 AV "sat without"). Yet the Greek *exo* translated "without" or "outside" is elsewhere used about the rejected being "cast out" (Mt. 5:13; 13:48), 'standing without' with the door shut (Lk. 13:25,28), like a fruitless branch cast out into the fire (Jn.

15:6). When we read that Peter “went out” from the Lord’s presence (Mt. 26:75), the same Greek word is used. The oaths which Peter used would probably have included ‘Before God!’. He was anticipating the judgment seat: before God he admitted he did not know His Son. But in this life we can be condemned- and yet be reprieved through repentance. But remember that Judas likewise “went out” into the darkness. Judas is described as "standing with" those who ultimately crucified Jesus in Jn 18:5. Interestingly the same idea occurs in Jn. 18:18 where Peter is described as standing with essentially the same group; point being, that Judas and Peter in essence did the same thing, they both denied their Lord and stood with His enemies. But one repented real repentance, whereas the other couldn't muster the faith for this. Lesson: We all deny the Lord, but the two paths before us are those of either Peter or Judas. Peter of course is our pattern. Perhaps Peter was encouraged towards repentance by recalling that just hours before, the Lord had predicted that the disciples would weep [s.w.], but their sorrow would be turned to joy (Jn. 16:20), in harmony with the Lord’s earlier teaching of blessedness for those who weep now. His weeping was intense, and he must’ve wondered how ever such weeping could be turned to joy. The only answer was that Jesus would have to die for Peter’s sin, be resurrected, forgive Peter and restore fellowship with him, even using him again in His service. It was upon this, then, that Peter desperately set his hope and faith- and it was rewarded.

CHAPTER 27

27:1 *Now when morning had arrived*- Trying a man through the night was hardly transparent or in accordance with the most basic standards of integrity. And yet on some issues, at this very same time, those men sought to carefully uphold their integrity and obedience to Divine principles. In this we see the tragic, cruel dualism of the human mind- and we understand again the call of God's word to give ourselves to Him with our *whole* heart.

All the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death- We sense their nervousness and conscious desire to try to spread the responsibility for their decision as wide as possible. We can imagine the learned, pseudo-spiritual shaking of heads amongst those men, arguing that they had, sadly, no option but... struggling, somewhere, with their own consciences, and desperately seeking support from others.

27:2 *And they bound him and led him away*- Israelites binding a man and delivering him over to Gentiles sounds very much like what Israel did to Samson. The Lord must've reflected how easily He likewise could have burst those bands and destroyed them all. The similarity with Samson is surely to remind us that He had those possibilities, but He was consciously choosing to give His life. The great paradox was that by accepting those bonds, He was thereby binding the strong man of sin and sin as manifested in the Jewish system (12:29). For "Led Him away" see on 26:57 *Led Him away.*

And delivered him up to Pilate the governor- The Lord knew that He was the Messianic "Governor" (2:6 s.w.), just as He was in fact the judge rather than the accused. He had only the previous evening pointed out that He was "the chief", the same word used for "Governor", but chose to be the servant (Lk. 22:26). The whole scenario was a total inversion of what was actually the case.

27:3 *Then Judas, who betrayed him*- "Betrayed" is the same Greek word as translated "delivered" in :2. Judas handed Him over to the Jews, and the Jews handed Him over to the Romans. We see here a reflection of the unity between Judas and the Jewish system, which is why both of these entities are called 'satan' or 'the devil'. Satan entered into Judas in the sense that he was taken over by the spirit of Judaism, the world system around him, just as we can be. The Lord foresaw all this; He realized that He must die by crucifixion, and therefore since the Jews didn't have the power to do it, He knew they would have to hand Him over to the Romans. There were elements of His sufferings which were clearly revealed to Him by the Father, but many of His predictions are also explicable in terms of His sensitivity and intense perception of the nature of human behaviour.

When he saw that he was condemned- Perhaps the emphasis should be upon the "he". I speculated earlier that part of the deal with Judas was that he was to be the key witness for the prosecution at the Sanhedrin trial. He surely would have been present, and seen Jesus condemned. But he perceived that actually Jesus was the judge, and it was he that was condemned by the Lord's condemnation at the hands of men. He was in the same position as Peter, who also at that same time realized that he was condemned, weeping the bitter tears of the rejected. But Judas simply didn't trust the Lord's grace.

Changed his mind- Literally, 'to care again / afterwards'. A different word is used for repentance in a moral sense. This word suggests that Judas was selfish to the last, and realized the best way to care for himself was to commit suicide. Faced with our sin, we have the option of responding either as Peter, in sincerity and vowing our loyalty again to our Lord, or as Judas did- caring for ourselves, trying to make the most of a bad situation, taking what we perceive to be the lesser of various evils which now face us. This latter option does of course involve an element of re-thinking, but that is not of itself repentance in the Biblical sense. As with all facets of spirituality, there is the true repentance and the false one, just as there is true peace and false peace, sincere love and feigned love, faith unfeigned and faith which is merely hoping for the best, prayer from the heart and prayer as a form of words. The Jews left in the land just after the Babylonian invasion had a sense of guilt, a knowledge that they were sinners and were suffering for their sin; but they had to be exhorted to truly *repent*: "This is what you are saying: 'Our offences and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'. Say to them... I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ez. 33:10,11 NIV). Like so many a prisoner, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

And brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders- The same word ["brought back"] used for how the Lord bade Peter put again his sword into the sheath (26:52). Again the similarity between the positions of the two men is being developed. The concern of Judas for the money surely reflects how financial motives had played a large part in his decision to betray the Lord. "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?" makes clear that he was obsessed with money. The record here emphasizes his attitude to the money- he brought it again to the Jews and then cast it down on the floor. Clearly he felt that the money had been a large part in his motivation. And again we should be aghast at what men will do for money, how strong is our love of it, our

desire for it... and this led Judas to commit the greatest sin ever committed in the cosmos.

27:4 *Saying*- As if he was speaking, admitting that "I have sinned", whilst holding the silver pieces in his hand. Again the impression is given that quite simply he did what he did from the love of money.

I have sinned- The very words of the repentant prodigal son, Job, Micah and David (Lk. 15:18,21; 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10; Job 7:20; Mic. 7:9). But instead of going back to the Father, Judas went and killed himself. Again we see that recognition of sin and regret for it are one thing, but this is not at all the same as repentance and conversion. Peter, who was in the same position as Judas, truly repented and converted. Instead of going to his own death, Peter went to the cross to see the death of God's Son, and perceived in that the possibility of his own forgiveness. "I have sinned" were likewise the words of Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16), Balaam (Num. 22:34), Achan (Josh. 7:20) and several times of Saul (1 Sam. 15:24,30; 26:21). But although these men all said the same words as the prodigal son, Job, Micah and David- they all perished in condemnation. Recognition of sin, therefore, is not the same as true repentance. To admit that we are, of course, sinners… is not the same as repentance and conversion. And so it was with Judas.

In that I have betrayed innocent blood- Judas at his final end recognized that Jesus was sinless; and he refers to Jesus not by His name, but as "the innocent blood". He had a good theoretical grasp of the principles of the atonement and the nature of Jesus. But that didn't help him. He recognized the ultimate innocence of Jesus. Correct knowledge concerning Jesus and recognition of personal sin is not enough to save us. There has to be the faith in grace which Peter had, and because Judas lacked this, he remained condemned. This highlights the fact that appreciation of grace is not just a cosmetic issue, but is fundamental to the Gospel and our personal salvation. The Greek word for "innocent" means literally 'not guilty'; Judas recognized that the Lord's trial at the hands of the Jews had been nothing but farcical, and the innocent had been condemned as guilty.

But they said: What is that to us? See to it yourself- Maybe their idea was that Judas had given his testimony in court and it could not now be retracted. Again we note their strict legalism on one hand, whilst behaving in the most unconscionable way on the other.

27:5 *And he threw the pieces of silver into*- The Greek *rhipto* literally means to disperse and is used in classical Greek for depositing money; it may be a technical term for a donation to the poor, or some sort of charitable donation. Perhaps this was his final repentance for stealing what had been intended as donations for the poor. This would explain why he didn't give the money back to the priests and elders, but rather

took it to the temple and cast it / dispersed / donated it there; hence they decided that it could not remain in "the treasury" (:6). He now gave it back, even though he had no personal hope of salvation because he didn't trust the Lord's grace.

The temple- Judas presumably had been at the High Priest's palace for the trial, and it was a fair walk from there to the temple. His visit to the priests and elders may have been at the High Priest's palace, not at the temple. So he went to the temple purposefully, to throw his money down in the temple, perhaps throwing it into the 'trumpets' into which people poured their money, and where the Lord had commented upon the widow throwing in her two last pennies. It would seem, therefore, that he did repent of his materialism, in the sense that he realized he had done wrong and wished to give those thirty pieces of silver at least to God's house and work. And yet he did not ultimately repent. See on :4 *I have sinned.* It is one thing to recognize our sin of materialism and to even give the wealth to the Lord's cause, but true repentance is another matter. It is a state of heart, and is modelled in Peter as opposed to Judas. It seems Judas did externally what was appropriate for someone who 'repented'; he returned the money to God, but this is still not enough. All that 'putting things right' was rather irrelevant compared to the need for faith in the Lord's grace and forgiveness.

And departed, and he went away and hanged himself- Adam attempted to hide from God's presence, the Hebrew implying 'to drawn oneself back'. Judas went away (Gk. he retired away), from the house of God, the temple, to try to hang himself, once he knew his condemnation (Mt. 27:5). He went to the Potter's field (Acts 1:18), which was in the Valley of Hinnom. He went to Gehenna, the place of condemnation, of his own accord. His own legs carried him there. Ps. 112:10 has echoes of the scenario: "The wicked shall see it (the Kingdom) and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth (judgment day language), and melt away". In similar vein the apostle speaks of the rejected as those who even now "*draw back* unto perdition" (Heb. 10:39). The implication is that by our attitude now, we effectively judge ourselves; if we draw back from Christ in this life, we will slink away from him in the day of judgment. The types of judgment also stress this slinking away. As there will be a slinking away at the final judgment, so there was at the cross, which was "the judgment of this world". Early on in the crucifixion, the people hurled confident insults at Him. But we get the impression that this died out over the hours; until "*all* the people that came together to that sight... smote their breasts, and returned" (Lk. 23:48). They slipped away, one by one, as those who brought the adulterous woman to the Lord (this was another type of the judgment; they slipped away from Him, self-condemned- (Jn. 8:9). All this was a foretaste of how there will be an ashamed slinking away from the judgment seat by the rejected, being "ashamed from before him at His coming", the Greek suggesting the idea of slinking away

in shame (1 Jn. 2:28 Gk.). The wicked will melt away from the Lord's presence (Ps. 68:2). Rejected Israel are described as being "ashamed away" (Joel 1:12)- the same idea. This is the idea behind Heb. 12:15 RVmg: "…man that falls back from the grace of God". What they did in this life in slinking away from the reality of pure grace will be what is worked out in their condemnation experience. There seems a certain similarity between this and how the combined Gospel records imply that men initially mocked Jesus on the cross, and then eventually slipped away in silence (Heb. 6:6).

27:6 *And the chief priests took the pieces of silver and said*- See on :5 *Cast down.* I suggested there that Judas actually put the silver pieces into the trumpet-like collection bowls, and thereby into the temple treasury. But the priests literally had to fish them out of there because of their legalistic obsession with not having blood money in the temple treasury. Even though they had likely taken that money out of the treasury themselves in the first place. Their self-contradictory legalism is a great theme of the record here.

It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood- "Put" here translates *ballo*, to throw. Although it is a different word to that used about Judas 'casting' the silver pieces in the temple [I suggested, into the collection containers], the idea is similar. They were now trying to find fault with Judas- and were claiming that he had acted incorrectly by 'casting' blood money into the temple treasury. Their idea that it was not lawful was based around their extension of the commandment of Dt. 25:18 "You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God". But there was not actually any direct Divine law which forbad those pieces of silver going into the temple treasury. Their extension of the *implication* of a Divine law had become, in their minds, itself a law which they had to obey. This is the problem with legalistic attitudes- more laws are spawned. Their concerns about what was lawful and "not lawful" run throughout the Gospel records (12:2,10; 19:3; 22:17 etc.). The Law of Moses was intended for the time and place it was given, and was part of an ongoing dialogue between God and His people; and the legal code given by Moses in places contradicts itself, or allows various options for obedience or various outcomes for disobedience [e.g. adultery]. It wasn't intended to be used in a casuistic sense, and parts of it were overridden or abrogated even before the Lord Jesus came. If it is used in a casuistic, black and white sense, then like any law, it logically spawns hosts of other requirements. What 'logically follows' becomes the deciding issue, rather than the spirit of loving God and doing what He wishes.

27:7 *And they took counsel*- As in :1. They were eager to spread responsibility for their actions in the entire business of killing the Lord; human beings feel safer beneath the umbrella of a committee, a group.

And yet those men, like us, will each have to meet the Lord personally and face the consequence of their actions.

And bought with them the potter's field- Acts 1:18 says that Judas "obtained it with the reward of his iniquity" (RV). And yet the thirty pieces of silver were still in his hand right up to the end of his life. Purchase of property was a slow business in Palestine, and nobody would have been doing business over the Passover feast. Neither is there any time in the narrative for Judas to have bought or obtained the field. And yet Acts 1:18 states that Judas "obtained" the field with the silver pieces, the reward of his iniquity, and killed himself there. I suggest the reconciliation is that the Jews bought the place where Judas had committed suicide *in Judas' name*, even though he was dead. This again would've involved a fair amount of fiddling books and behaviour of low integrity. And yet it was ostensibly done in strict and careful obedience to the idea that money earned by dishonest means should not be brought into the temple; this was based on Dt. 25:18 "You must not bring the hire of a prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of Yahweh your God". Again and again we see how these men who committed the worst possible sin in the entire universe… were strictly legally obedient to some Divine laws and the principles arising from them. This is a powerful warning to all of us religious people; we can so easily serve God with only part of our mind, one half of our brain. And the results are disastrous. Nothing less than the entire heart and soul and mind must be given over to Him.

The Potter's field was in the Valley of Hinnom, Gehenna; Judas went to Gehenna to kill himself, the ultimate proof that all who shall finally be condemned will in essence have condemned themselves.

To bury strangers in- Thus through the death of Christ it became possible that Gentiles could have a place within Jerusalem, the city of God.

27:8 *Therefore that field is called to this day, The field of blood*- This was surely not what the Jewish leadership wished it to be called. Time and again we see that their careful plans didn't work out. Likewise they bribed the soldiers guarding the tomb to say that the Lord's body had been stolen- and the news of their bribery became widespread. "Unto this day" suggests an early date to the Gospels.

27:9 *Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying: And they took the thirty pieces of silver*- The quotation is from Zechariah (Zech. 11:12). The standard explanations are that the volume of the prophets in which Zechariah was included began with Jeremiah and was therefore referred to as "Jeremiah"; or that in fact Jeremiah wrote Zechariah 9-11 and this was included in the prophecy now known as Zechariah. For more on this, see on :10 *The potter's field.* Given the very detailed congruence between reality and the Gospel records, it would be unlikely that such an obvious error was made. We who believe in an

inspired Bible should rather, in any case, say with humility "I am still searching for more light on this question" rather than assume that here we have an evidence of a fallible Bible. If one part is inaccurate, what about the rest... The context of Zech. 11:12,13 is significant- note the pronouns in the Hebrew text, in that the money was cast to the potter by the same prophet who had been valued at the low price of 30 pieces of silver: "If it seem good to you, give me my wages; but if not, let it alone: and they weighed me as wages thirty silverlings. Then Jehovah said to me, Throw it to the potter, the splendid price at which I am valued by them; and so I took the thirty silverlings, and threw it into the house of Jehovah to the potter". Throwing it to the potter was a response of sarcasm [as was the reference to "the splendid price"], in that this was the price of a dead slave (Ex. 21:32), and far below what a prophet should have been valued at, let alone the Son of God. Just as Judas threw the coins into the temple treasury, so the Jews threw them to the potter. Judas and the Jewish leadership are thereby once again connected, they were part of the same 'satan' system which was the adversary to the Lord. Those learned Jews, steeped as they were in the text of Scripture, surely closed their minds to these words as they so clearly fulfilled them. We too can know Scripture, and yet the flesh has a way of hiving off the part of our minds that is aware of them. And according to the prophecy, it was the undervalued prophet himself who threw the coins to the potter. The action of the Jewish elders was therefore directly controlled by the risen Lord. This connection between the prophet (Jesus) and the Jews is surely reflected by the way in which the Hebrew text speaks of the prophet himself throwing the coins to the potter, whereas that is quoted here in Matthew as if they, the children of Israel, cast them to the potter. See on :10 *As the Lord appointed Me.* If they had thought upon Zechariah 11 with open minds, they would have seen in their own actions the very evidence that He was alive and working through them to their own condemnation. And the context of Zech. 11:12,13 is God's breaking of His covenant with Israel because of their undervaluing of His prophet. This is precisely what happened in that the new covenant was confirmed to the extent that the old covenant was abrogated.

The price of him on whom a price had been set- The implication is that the Lord's price was 30 pieces of silver. This is strong evidence against the suggestion often made that the 30 pieces were a down-payment made to Judas. That suggestion is perhaps so frequently offered because 30 pieces of silver seems such a low price. But Judas had asked: "What will you give me, and I will betray Him unto you?", and the price agreed was 30 pieces of silver. But we need not be so surprised. Because surely we have all seen people make the most unwise and sinful decisions for the sake of money, even relatively small amounts of it. And the more I reflect upon these records, the more convinced I am that the crime of the cosmos, of all time in eternity, the worst action at any point of infinite time and space, was committed for love of money. And so pathetically

little of it. It truly is the root of all evil. And such a pathetically small amount, the compensation price of a dead slave, that could only buy a piece of ground in the despised valley of Hinnom, the Potter's field, muddy and useless for building, from which much of the clay had already been dug out by the potters, surrounded by the smell of burning bodies and garbage that remained constantly in the valley of Hinnom. In these reflections is surely the most powerful warning which there could be against petty materialism. Peter had surely reflected upon all this when he wrote of "the precious blood of Christ... unto you therefore who believe He is precious" (1 Pet. 1:19; 2:7), using the same word translated here as "valued". Indeed, that family of Greek words is used around 12 times by Peter in his letters; the tragedy of how the Lord was not "valued" by Judas and Israel was a tragedy to Peter, and he wanted the church to compensate for it. *We* are to value Him and His blood, far more than Judas and the Jews did.

By some of the sons of Israel- Jesus was "Him… whom they priced on the part of the sons of Israel" (Mt. 27:9 RVmg.). The reference to "the sons of Israel" is surely an allusion to the sons of Jacob selling Joseph for his value.

27:10 *And they gave them for the potter's field*- We cannot miss the fact that the potter is a clear Old Testament symbol for God (Is. 41:25; 64:8; Jer. 18:6; 19:11; Rom. 9:21). And "the field is the world" (Mt. 13:38). The price of the Lord's blood bought the potter's field, God's field, the world, as a resting place for faithful Gentiles who had come on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and died there. We noted on :9 *By Jeremiah* that Zech. 11:12,13 was likely written by Jeremiah. And that now makes sense. Because it was at "the potter's house" that Jeremiah had uttered his prophecies, stating that God was the potter, He was manifest in that potter to whose field Jeremiah had 'gone down' (Jer. 18:2; 'going down' implies it was in a valley, as was the Potter's Field bought by the Jews). The money being cast to the potter therefore suggests that ultimately, all returns to God. No silver pieces are ours for ever, as they were not the Jews' nor Judas's. It was ultimately thrown to the potter in the Potter's Field, the very place where Jeremiah had prophesied and explained that that potter was in fact representative of God.

As the Lord directed me- See on :9 *By Jeremiah*. The throwing of the coins to the potter by "the children of Israel" was in fact done by the undervalued prophet, the Lord Jesus. Their purchase of the field was surely done after Passover had finished- after the Lord's resurrection. And actually He was controlling what they did. If they had compared their actions against Zechariah 11, a passage they knew well, then they would have perceived this.

27:11 *Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him*- This is Matthew's preferred term for Pilate. Perhaps he doesn't name Pilate because he wants to draw out the similarity between how the Lord stood before a governor, and how those in Christ (especially in the last days) will likewise be brought before "governors" (10:18; Mk. 13:19; Lk. 21:12 "You shall be brought before governors"). This is yet another example of how the faithful in the very final days of the tribulation will share in the spirit of Christ's passion; even if they do not literally die, they will be led by the tribulation experience to identify with the spirit of the suffering Christ, so that they can legitimately share in the spirit of His resurrection life.

Are you the King of the Jews?- Out of the various Jewish accusations against the Lord, this was the only one which directly affected the Romans, and was the technical reason for Pilate agreeing to the death penalty; it was this reason which was written over the Lord's head on the cross. The irony of the situation must have rubbed hard upon the Lord; He was dying as the King of a people, not one of whom would openly show loyalty to Him. In any suffering we may have because of feeling utterly alone, betrayed, having lived life to no end, not being shown loyalty by those we expect it of- we are connected with the spirit of the cross.

And Jesus said to him: You say it- Jesus before Pilate said just one word in Greek; translated "You say it". It is stressed there that Jesus said nothing else, so that Pilate marvelled at His silent self-control. Yet Paul speaks with pride of how the Lord Jesus "before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. 6:13). You'd expect him to be alluding to some major speech of Jesus. But it seems, reading his spirit, Paul's saying: 'Lord Jesus, your self control, your strength of purpose, was great. I salute you, I hold you up to Timothy as the supreme example. Just one word. What a witness!'. As He witnessed in His ministry, so must we (Rom. 2:19 cp. Mt. 4:16). As He witnessed before Pilate, so must we witness (1 Tim. 6:12,13).

27:12 *And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders*- The accusations were of course false (as Pilate himself pointed out, Lk. 23:14), making the chief priests and Jewish system the 'devil', the false accuser. In my *The Real Devil* I demonstrated at length that the terms 'satan' and 'devil' often refer specifically to the Jewish system in the first century. The paradox was that it was those very Jews who were standing in the dock before God, accused by the writings of Moses (Jn. 5:45). And yet we must give Jn. 12:42 its due weight- many of the chief rulers believed in Jesus as Christ but were fearful of the Pharisees and exclusion from the synagogue. So it has so often been- fear of religious excommunication leads believers to crucify their Christ brethren. Their behaviour is explained by the repeated descriptions of the Jews 'gathering

together' to take their decisions about killing the Lord. In company, men adopt positions far beyond those they personally hold, and even strongly against their own personal convictions. Reading the account of Jewish treatment of Jesus, it seems incredible, at first blush, that some or even "many" of those men "believed in Him". But this is the power of group think and the fear of appearing strange to others, or being rejected by others, especially from their religious fellowship.

He said nothing- Perhaps for the same reason that He remained silent during the Jewish trial (see notes on 26:63). His only answer would be to speak judgment against them, and He wished to delay this until the last possible moment, in order to give them the chance for repentance. So many times in the Gospel records, in Matthew especially, we read that during His ministry the Lord "answered and said...". The same Greek word is used. He had given His answer to their accusations and positions throughout His ministry, and now the time for providing fresh evidence was over. They knew His answers.

27:13 *Then Pilate said to him: Do you not hear how many things*- The implication was 'Are you deaf?'. The Lord was fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies that Messiah would be as deaf before His accusers (Ps. 38:13 "I as a deaf man don't hear"; Is. 42:19 "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?"). The quotation from Psalm 38 is from one of the Psalms David wrote concerning his failure with Bathsheba and subsequent sufferings. Many other of these Psalms, especially Psalms 22 and 69, are full of material relevant to the Lord's sufferings. We observe therefore that through suffering for his sin, David came to know the sufferings of his future Messiah. We marvel at how God works through sin. He doesn't ignore it, nor simply punish men for the sake of needing to punish them. Those sufferings and the very experience of sin are somehow worked through by God in order to bring men to His Son and to His cross. We likewise should not turn away from sinners but rather seek to work with them to bring them to know Christ, knowing that this is indeed God's game plan with them too. The allusion to Is. 42:19 must be understood likewise in the context of that passage. The preceding verse has appealed to the blind and deaf within Judah at that time: "Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind" (Is. 42:18), and then goes on say that sinless Messiah likewise was deaf and blind. We see here a principle that was to be worked out throughout the Lord's passion- He identified with sinners. They were deaf and blind, and He now acted as deaf and blind, He identified with sinners to the point that He felt as a sinner. His silence to the accusations was therefore also capable of being understood as the silence of a guilty man before His accusers. Not that the Lord was guilty, but He identified with sinful man to the extent that He felt that way, and this all came to its final term in His genuine feeling that He had been forsaken even by God (:46). Not that He was, for God

only forsakes sinners and never forsakes the righteous (see notes on :46). But He so identified with sinners that the Lord felt as one of us, although He was not a sinner. Yet as the Lord stood before His accusers silent, He knew great peace; so Is. 42:19 assures us: "Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as *he who is at peace*, and as blind as Yahweh's servant?".

They testify against you- The Greek is used only four times in the New Testament; twice at this point (in Mk. 15:4 also) and twice in the comment of the High Priest at the Lord's earlier trial (Mt. 26:62; Mk. 14:60). Circumstances repeated. The Lord learnt silence at the first trial, and there was the same reaction from the judge; and now the situation repeated itself, although Pilate had not been present at the first trial. He overcame that first test, and repeated the victory. We have seen how in contrast to this, Peter was given various tests which he failed the first time and then subsequent times when they were repeated (e.g. the three failures to keep awake in Gethsemane, and the triple failure to not deny the Lord later that evening).

27:14 *And he gave him no answer, not even one word, so much so that the governor was astonished*- This is the same response by the judge as at the Lord's earlier trial (26:62,63; see on 27:13 *They testify against you*). Pilate had presided over many such cases of men being falsely accused. He was astounded at how a man in the face of such blatantly false accusation could be so self-controlled. This, in spiritual terms, was our Lord at one of His most supreme moments. He sets a supreme example to all those falsely accused. Pilate was also staggered at how the Lord had a good human chance of getting off the hook by answering what was blatantly false. But the Lord's mission was to give His life- it was not taken from Him, He gave it. And therefore He made no attempt to get Himself off.

27:15 *Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd*- The Greek is also translated 'to forgive', and there was within the 'release' the idea that the crime had been forgiven. This was not, therefore, completely appropriate for the Lord Jesus, who had done no wrong. The same word is used in Acts 2:24 of how God "loosed" Jesus from the pangs of death. The Lord's temptation would have been to hope against hope that each of the human possibilities of release would come true. But He had resolutely decided to do God's will unto the end, and therefore He knew that the only ultimate release would be in resurrection, and that would be performed by the Father rather than by any human power. The language of loosing or releasing [s.w.] is used about what the Lord achieved by His death (He 'loosed' the works of the devil, 1 Jn. 3:8; loosed the middle wall of partition, Eph. 2:14; loosed the seals on the book of life, Rev. 5:5). As ever, the paradox was that this release, this form of salvation, falsely appeared to be in the power of those who

crucified the Lord. But the Lord saw through it all. Likewise, they appeared His judges and He appeared the guilty; when the opposite was the case.

Any one prisoner whom they wanted- In essence, they had made their choice earlier. The Lord had used the same word in 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not [s.w. "wanted"] have condemned the guiltless". The Lord perceived that the essence of the cross, the essence of all that was happening to Him, had already happened during His ministry. They had already condemned the guiltless. This would have helped Him not to hang too intensely on the possibility of the outcome of events changing suddenly at the last minute through some failure in their legal process. And we perceive too that there was no great divide between His final intense sufferings, and what He went through during His life. Our carrying of the cross likewise is a daily matter, rather than a few moments of intense choice which occur during our lives. The same Greek word translated "wanted" occurs three times in describing how they 'wanted' to condemn Jesus and 'wanted' Barabbas (:15,17,21). Lk. 23:25 concludes the section by saying that Pilate "delivered Jesus to their will". It is the same word which the Lord had agonized over in Gethsemane- "Not as I *will*, but as You *will*" (26:39). Even though it appeared that the will of evil, conniving men was being done, it was in fact the Father's will. And we can take similar comfort when it appears that the will of evil men is being done. Ultimately, there is the Father's will far over and above them, working on a far higher level, although we cannot see the final picture of His purpose in specific moments. It can be painless of itself to pray the Father's will be done (6:10), but this is what it meant for the Lord. It took Him an hour [long enough for the disciples to fall asleep] to pray for the Father's will to be done, and not His (26:42). In the Lord's ministry, He had sought to do not His own will but the Father's (Jn. 5:30; 6:38), and this came to its ultimate moment in His situation in Gethsemane facing the cross. Again we see that the essence of Gethsemane and of the Lord's choice to die on the cross was not simply in these final intense moments, but was an outflow of a life daily lived by that principle, in which to do the Father's will was the food He ate and the air He breathed (Jn. 4:34). John doesn't record the Lord's struggle in Gethsemane concerning doing the Father's will rather than His own will, but [as so often] John has made the same point in other ways earlier in his Gospel; John has shown the Lord making this choice throughout His life, and inviting His followers to do likewise (Jn. 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). This is John's way of showing that the essence of Gethsemane and the cross was to be found throughout the Lord's life.

27:16 *And they had then a notable prisoner called*- The Greek *epi-semos* literally means 'one of sign'; we are thereby invited to see the name 'Barabbas' as signifying something. Before the Jews were two men claiming to be sons of Abba, and they chose the false one. The Lord's

claim to be Son of God was the reason why the Jews particularly wanted to kill Him.

Barabbas- Son of Abba, the father. This man was clearly an anti-Christ, a fake Christ, a man set up in appearance as the Christ, the son of God, when he was the very opposite. And Israel chose him. His similarity with the Lord is made even more interesting by the fact that some early manuscripts (such as the Caesarean, the Sinaitic Palimpsest and the Palestinian Syriac) here read 'Jesus Barabbas' (Referenced in Craig A. Evans, *Matthew (New Cambridge Bible Commentary)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 p. 453.). The four gospel records only occasionally all record the same incident. When they do all mention the same thing, it seems that the Spirit intends us to see an especial significance in this. The fact that the crowd chose Barabbas rather than the Lord of glory is one of those aspects of the Passion which is recorded by all four writers. There is much information given about Barabbas, emphasizing the kind of criminal he was (Mt. 27:16; Mk. 15:7; Lk. 23:19; Jn. 18:40). That men would reject the righteousness of God, the Spotless Lamb of God, for such a man... this is the tragic story of our race and our nature. And it was the ecclesia of those days which made this dastard choice, and crucified the Lord Jesus. The same nature, the same blindness, is in us all.

27:17 *Therefore, when they were gathered together, Pilate said to them: Who do you want me to*- See on 26:57. The way the Jews were "gathered together" at this time, literally 'synagogued', is significant in that we see how the Lord's passion gathered men together, either for or against Him. And it is the same today.

Release to you- This word is used of how Paul could have been released or "let go" because after examination by the Romans, "there was no cause of death in me" (Acts 28:18). Paul's trials are full of connection with those of the Lord, and Paul (like us) took special comfort in any similarity between the Lord's sufferings and his own. For this is indeed why we have such a mass of detail about the Lord's final sufferings- we are to see endless points of connection between His experiences and our own. And as Paul says, if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. It was to this process which we signed up to at baptism, in which we dedicated ourselves to a life of dying and living with Him.

Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?- Not 'who claims to be Christ' or 'is called by some 'the Christ''. Pilate is reminding them Jesus was the Christ, and they had stated that they thought this was a capital offence. Pilate was offering them the choice between Barabbas and Jesus exactly because he knew they would choose Barabbas. He had a conscience about the matter of this Jesus of Nazareth, and he wanted the choice to crucify Him to be theirs and not his. He cleverly reasoned that he had

pronounced Jesus innocent, but the choice to kill him would effectively have been the choice of the Jews if they chose Barabbas over Jesus. This is all the sense of the following explanatory comment "For he knew that they had delivered him up out of envy".

27:18 *For he knew that they had delivered Him up out of*- See on :17 *Jesus which is called Christ*. Pilate was encouraging them to choose Barabbas over Jesus so that the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion would be upon them and not him. Bible critics have pointed out that this was unusual behaviour for Pilate, renowned as he was for being a brutal and apparently conscienceless man. Indeed he was that- but the point is that the Lord Jesus in His time of dying can touch even the person whose conscience appears to be otherwise untouchable. This was and is the power of the cross of Christ. I suggest we are mistaken in reading this as if Pilate wanted them to choose Jesus for release and was mystified they chose Barabbas. He asked them to choose, knowing they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy. He wanted them to take the choice, in an attempt to assuage his own conscience.

Envy- James 4:5 reminds us that "The spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy" (s.w.). Envy is a basic human tendency which we must restrain. In the whole process of the Lord's betrayal, abuse and crucifixion we see the end result of basic human tendencies when they are let go unrestrained. The crucifixion of God's Son is where they lead. This is the shocking message of the whole process the Gospels record concerning the Lord's death at the hands of the Jews. The point is that we have the same nature, and unrestrained, we shall end up in essence doing the same.

27:19 *And while he was sitting on the judgment seat*- This may not be strictly chronological. The AV offers: “When he was set down…”, as if he had no sooner sat down to consider the case when the message came from his wife, implying that Jesus was a righteous man and should not be crucified with Pilate’s involvement. In any case, I suggest that this piece of information is given to explain why Pilate acted as he did in offering the Jews a choice between Jesus and Barabbas, knowing full well that “they had delivered [Jesus] out of envy” and therefore blindly wanted his destruction. Although usually conscienceless, Pilate’s own nagging conscience was confirmed by the message from his wife, and therefore he came up with this idea of trying to offload responsibility onto the Jews, forcing them to effectively chose that Jesus should be crucified. Of course, the power was ultimately with Pilate, and this was but a desperate ploy to avoid ultimate guilt; but the fact he did it reflects the degree to which the Lord Jesus can touch even the hardest consciences.

His wife- It seems it was Origen who started the tradition that she later became a Christian thanks to a dream given her about Jesus.

Sent a message to him, saying: Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him- These are the very same Greek words used at least four times to record the Lord's prediction of His crucifixion as being a 'suffering of many things' (Mt. 16:21; Mk. 9:12; Lk. 9:22; 17:25). This sensitive woman had a correct premonition of what was to happen to the Lord, and dreamed about it; and sensing His innocence and origin from God, she didn't want her husband to be involved in bringing those sufferings about. Again this claim has the ring of truth to it the more it is meditated upon.

27:20 *Now the chief priests and the elders*- The Greek *deh* translated "Now" is often untranslated in English, it's a connecting word meaning 'Now… And…'. The idea is not so much that Pilate wanted to release Jesus *but* the priests worked against that. Pilate knew they envied Jesus and were intent on having Him executed, and wished to place the decision as far as he could in their hands in order to not have the Lord's blood on his hands. Such were his attempts to ease his conscience.

Persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus- It could be that the Jewish leadership also had an uneasy conscience. Pilate wanted to shift the responsibility onto them, and they in turn wanted the crowd to be the ones who made the decision. Because it seems that the person to be released at Passover was not usually chosen by mass decision or request, rather the decision was made by Pilate. But in this case, he gets the Jewish leadership to choose between Jesus and Barabbas. And they in turn get the crowd involved in the choice, just as they kept 'consulting together' before each decision regarding Jesus. This all indicates how conscience was being touched in all those concerned. It is a powerful insight into the degree to which the Lord Jesus and His death can touch the most hardened conscience; and even those who appear to have absolutely no conscience do in fact have one, which can be touched by Christ. We see too the fickleness of the crowd- those who once welcomed Jesus as Messiah just a few days before, were so soon turned around against Him. And then turned back again a few weeks later by Peter's preaching.

27:21 *But the governor answered and said to them: Which of the two do you want me to release to you? And they said: Barabbas!*- Putting together the Gospel records at this point, it is clear that Pilate first asked the Jewish leadership which of the two they wanted, and then he asked the crowd; and it would seem Pilate asked each group the same question at least twice, whilst emphasizing that he did not consider that Jesus was worthy of death and would be happy to release Jesus to them. At first blush this may appear as if Pilate was seeking to persuade first the leaders and then the crowd to allow him to release Jesus to them- and failed to get their agreement. I take a slightly different position. We have

noted that Pilate gave the choice to them exactly because he knew that the leaders had delivered Jesus to him *because they envied Jesus* and therefore wanted Him dead. I would understand Pilate's offers to release Jesus as carefully calculated to produce the obvious result- each time the offer was made, the leaders and then the crowd shouted yet louder to destroy Jesus. Those outcomes were not hard to predict. Pilate knew they would respond like this, and he was playing the crowd, rather than simply making the same appeal to them and being shouted down ever louder each time. But the point to note is surely that he was doing all this to assuage his own conscience; he wanted the Jews to take absolute, widespread and public responsibility for the death of Jesus, and therefore once he had the crowd worked up into a frenzy of desiring Barabbas rather than Jesus, he solemnly washed his hands before them all, claiming that this was totally their choice. Of course, it was ultimately his choice, and he was indeed concerned to hear himself being called 'not Caesar's friend'. My point is that this conscienceless man did in fact have a conscience, which was touched by Jesus and the prospect of His crucifixion. And that is to me the only satisfactory explanation of his long drawn out psychological game with the Jews, and even then it was not ultimately successful nor convincing in distancing himself from the decision to crucify Jesus. See on :22 *What then shall I do to Jesus*.

27:22 *Pilate said to them: What then shall I do to Jesus who is called Christ? They all said: Let him be crucified!*- This is asking an obvious question, seeing that the record has noted that Pilate knew they had delivered Jesus to him out of envy, and they had made it abundantly clear that they sought the death penalty for Him. Pilate asked the question knowing full well the answer they were going to give. But he wanted to elicit from them in clear, specific and public terms that it was *their wish* that Jesus be crucified. See on :21 *Which of the two do you want me to release to you?* It was all part of an extended psychological game Pilate was playing with them, leading them to so clearly take the blame for the Lord's crucifixion. But he only bothered doing this because his conscience was troubling him, and in this we see a powerful insight into the way the Lord's death can touch the hardest of consciences. This is the very reason why reflection upon the Lord in His time of dying leads on naturally to true self-examination. And in this lies the connection between self-examination and the breaking of bread service.

27:23 *And he said: Why, what evil has he done?*- Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus to him from envy, and that there was no legitimate reason for the death sentence. But in line with my commentary on :21 and :22, I suggest he is not so much seeking to change their minds, but rather purposefully seeking to elicit from the Jews a clear statement that they wanted Him crucified.

But they cried out exceedingly, saying: Let him be crucified!- When

people are pressed for a reason for their unreasonable positions and behaviours, they simply say the same thing again, but more loudly (in various ways). This is the classic example- they repeated their cry "Let Him be crucified!". Surely Pilate knew that they would respond like this, and I see him as stage managing the entire crowd, purposefully leading the crowd to cry out ever louder, in order to set the stage for his public washing of his hands. But he played this elaborate game because he had a conscience, and wanted to try to separate himself from the decision to crucify the Lord.

27:24 *So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying*- I do not take this as meaning that Pilate tried to prevail upon the crowd to change their mind, but now gave up. Rather do I take this as meaning that he realized that he had played his psychological game with the crowd long enough (see commentary on the previous three verses), and saw that if he played it any longer, then a riot could break out. And so he brought his game to an end, having successfully elicited from them a clear taking of responsibility for the decision to crucify Jesus, and now he washes his hands publicly. But this of course did not take away his ultimate responsibility- for he could have simply thrown the case out of court. But he correctly perceived that if he were to do that, then there would be major rebellion against him.

I am innocent of this man's blood- The historical Pilate is recorded as killing men for any or even no reason, and being apparently conscienceless. But he is clearly concerned with declaring his own innocence, using a Greek word which means 'without penalty'. He realized there was going to be a penalty paid for crucifying Jesus. Surely he wasn't fearful of his Roman overlords or Caesar himself demanding a penalty for crucifying Jesus. Pilate was clearly aware that there was someone who was going to execute a penalty upon those who crucified Jesus; and Pilate wanted to publicly declare his innocence and to protest that he at least should be without penalty. That someone was the one true God. Pilate could not see the death of God's Son without realizing that men are held accountable by God for their part in it. Again we see the power of the cross in touching even the most callous and concealed conscience. We are left to reflect that of course Pilate was not ultimately without responsibility in the decision making- he could have refused. And we therefore reflect further that no man can just declare himself right or innocent before God; that declaration can only be made by God. This is the whole idea of justification, of being counted right. But this requires faith in God and Jesus.

Guilt for the Lord's blood was placed clearly upon the Jews (23:35 "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth", "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us", Acts 5:28). Acts 3:14

condemns Israel for desiring a murderer and rejecting "The Just", the same word used by Pilate "this *just* person". These Scriptures, and many others, clearly place the blame for the Lord's crucifixion upon the Jews rather than Pilate and the Romans, even though Pilate was clearly not innocent. Hence the Lord's observation to Pilate that "he" who had handed Him over to Pilate had "the greater sin" (Jn. 19:11). The "he" was the Jewish system. We marvel at the Lord's grace to Pilate, who clearly was weak and didn't do what he knew he should have done; it's as if He perceived Pilate's struggle of conscience and felt sorry for him about it, and as it were comforts Pilate that although he is sinning, the greater sin was being committed by the Jews. In this again we see how grace and pity ran through all the Lord's actions at this time; facing death, who He essentially was became revealed the more intensely. And He was and is grace, pity and love to their utmost.

This just person- AV. Even the deeply immoral Pilate perceived the Lord's sinlessness. He uses the same word as used by his wife in :19 "Have nothing to do with that *just man*". The immoral Herod likewise perceived that John was "a just man" (Mk. 6:20 s.w.). The Centurion echoed Pilate's words as he beheld the Lord's death: "Certainly this was [as Pilate had famously said] a righteous / just man" (Lk. 23:47 s.w.). If Pilate was purely dealing with this case with no conscience, then he would not have used this term, involving as it does a moral judgment and commendation of Jesus. And we wonder at how Pilate insisted upon writing on the inscription over the cross "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews", rather than as the Jews wished, 'He *claimed to be* King of the Jews'. Is it too much to think that Pilate had indeed grasped the elemental truth about Jesus and even believed it? Perhaps at that moment, he did- but didn't maintain his faith.

See to it yourselves- The very phrase just recently used by the Jews to Judas (:6). It's as if Pilate was aware of how they had treated Judas, and is quoting their own words back to them. It's as if Pilate perceived the Jews as Judas. God certainly saw the Jews and Judas as connected, for they are both termed the great satan / devil / adversary to the Lord Jesus. Pilate' perception and insight at this point is significant, hence my suggestion above that Pilate on one level almost became a believer in Jesus through being exposed to Him close up and by reflecting upon His death. There is indeed something in the death and cross of Christ which brings men to faith. There is surely some truth to the old missionary stories of unresponsive, illiterate tribes becoming strangely responsive when the cross of Christ was explained and portrayed to them.

27:25 *Pilate washed his hands*- AV. Do we feel that our conscience is so dysfunctional and our heart so hardened in some places that nothing much can touch us and motivate us like it used to? The cross can touch and transform the hardest and most damaged heart. Apart from many

real life examples around of this, consider the Biblical case of Pilate. Jewish and Roman historians paint a very different picture of Pilate than what we see in the Biblical record. Philo describes him as “ruthless, stubborn and of cruel disposition", famed for “frequent executions without trial". Josephus speaks of him as totally despising the Jews, stealing money from the temple treasury and brutally suppressing unruly crowds. Why then does he come over in the Gospels as a man desperately struggling with his conscience, to the extent that the Jewish crowds manipulate him to order the crucifixion of a man whom he genuinely believed to be innocent? Surely because the person of the Lord Jesus and the awfulness of putting the Son of God to death touched a conscience which appeared not to even exist. If the whole drama of the death of Jesus could touch the conscience and personality of even Pilate, it can touch each of us. Just compare the words of Philo and Josephus with how Mark records that Pilate was “amazed" at the self-control of Jesus under trial (Mk. 15:5); how he almost pleads with his Jewish subjects for justice to be done: “Why, what evil has he done?" (Mk. 15:14). Compare this with how Philo speaks of Pilate as a man of “inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition", famous for “abusive behaviour… and endless savage ferocity". Mt. 27:25 describes how Pilate washes his hands, alluding to the Jewish rite based in Deuteronomy, to declare that he is innocent of the blood of a just man. But Josephus records how Pilate totally despised Jewish religious customs and sensibilities, and appeared to love to commit sacrilege against Jewish things. And in Luke’s record, Pilate is recorded as pronouncing Jesus innocent no less than three times. I so admire the way the Lord attempted even as He faced death in the face, to appeal to Pilate's conscience. I'd paraphrase Mk. 15:2 like this: 'Pilate: 'You are King of Israel?'. Jesus: 'You're saying it''. Why did the Lord put it like that? Surely because He knew that Pilate, in his conscience, did actually know that Jesus was King of Israel, and the very words [in the original] 'You are King of Israel' came out of his lips, as a kind of psychological slip. This small incident not only indicates how the suffering Jesus could touch even Pilate's conscience; but that the Lord was eagerly seeking the response of men, even the toughest and unspiritual, right to His very end. And He is the same today. May our feeble responses give Him pleasure and glory.

And all the people answered and said: His blood is on us and on our children- The Jews perceived that Pilate was genuinely concerned about his own guilt in the matter, hence their attempt to assure him that it was indeed their choice and responsibility. Again we see how Pilate's conscience was visibly at work. In both his and their attitudes, they wrongly assume that human beings can ascribe and decide guilt. It is impossible for us to do this. The guilt for the Lord's death is apportioned by God and not man. This provides insight into the question of whether the children or descendants of the Jews involved are indeed carrying the guilt for the Lord's blood. It is God who decides individual human guilt; He

doesn't punish the children for the sins of their ancestors. Whether or not the ancestors asked for their children to suffer is in this sense irrelevant- it hardly means the descendants will suffer just because of a statement made generations ago. And we should note that the rubric 'We and our children' often refers only to the immediate generation, not to longer distance descendants. Further, there were likely no more than a few hundred people at most who shouted these words; they did not speak them as official representatives of anyone, and they cannot surely refer to the children of any other people [e.g. the rest of Israel] apart from their own. To explain the Holocaust and anti-Jewishness as a fulfilment of these words seems to me quite mistaken. Such things occurred and do occur because of faults within the minds and cultures of those performing them, and not because of any particular guilt in the individual Jews who suffered. Many racial groups have suffered because of baseless aggression from other groups; but it would be facile to posit that the individuals who suffered were somehow guilty as charged by their obsessive attackers. The simple reason for anti-Jewishness is jealousy and the nexus of thinking and action which accompanies it. The fault for murdering and abusing Jewish people is solely with the abusers, and not because of the emotional cry of some members of the Jewish race many generations ago. This verse is a classic example of where although the record of the Bible is inspired, the words recorded as having been on the lips of men are not always true in their content. Sennacherib's claims outside the walls of Jerusalem would be another example.

In reality, the people screamed the words they did because they became increasingly obsessed with the conviction that Jesus was guilty. They were so sure that He was *not* innocent blood, that they were able to confidently ask for any possible guilt to be upon them and their children. Their conviction on this point was therefore very great, and yet it was elicited by the repeated reminders from Pilate that Jesus was *not* guilty; both Herod and Pilate had concluded the same about Him. Everyone knew the trials were a farce and the case had collapsed from lack of evidence. And yet the more conscience was prodded, the blinder these people became to the evidence. Again we have a telling insight into human nature. Blindness descends upon people the more they are led to the light- unless they respond to it. The Lord's crucifixion is the parade example. This is where human psychology and human nature leads when it is confronted by God's Son, unless there is an acceptance of Him.

Peter addressed this same group just six weeks later, very close to the spot where they shouted this out. And he alludes to their words "our children", by saying that the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to them and to their children (Acts 2:39). I have suggested in *Bible Basics* that in its first context, the gift which the Holy Spirit enabled or gave was that of forgiveness of sins and turning away from sin. In this case, Peter was directly addressing those words of the crowd, willing the Lord's bloodguilt

upon them and their children. For those words would be ringing like an echo in the memories of everyone in Jerusalem. Not just for those who had been in the crowd, but for all Jewish people, as they wondered whether God would in fact honour the words of those men upon all Israel. And Peter speaks [as we should in our preaching] directly to those fears of his audience, both spoken and unspoken. The simple fact was that instead of a curse upon them and their children, they and their children could be cleansed in the blood of Christ and find [as Peter had] the blessed gift of forgiveness.

27:26 *Then he released Barabbas to them, but Jesus he scourged*- As soon as the sentence was pronounced: You shall be crucified, the victim was stripped naked and fastened to a post about as high as the waist and then flogged. Josephus twice mentions that the body was stripped naked and flogged until the flesh hung down in shreds. 13 stripes were against His breast, 26 on the back. They probably chanted them. He may have had a slab of iron between His teeth to grit against. Men were known to have bitten their tongues in two during the whipping. John Pollock explains that the victim was stretched with hands above his head, whipped by naked slaves with a device of three leather thongs laced with pieces of sharpened bone, whilst a clerk stood with a slab on which to take down confessions (John Pollock, *The Master* (Victor Books, 1985), p. 160).

Scourging was usually "accomplished by tying the victim's wrists to an iron ring set about knee level, so that he would be bent over; or, facing or backed to a column, the wrists would be tied overhead. There were probably two scourgers, standing on each side, each with whips five or six feet long ending in two leather thongs tipped with metal. As the scourging whips fell across the victim's back they would wrap around his body at times lacerating his body front and back, so that scourge marks soon covered all of his body except the head, feet, and forearms... It was uncommon for the Romans to both scourge and crucify a person. Why was it done to Jesus? It has been conjectured by some scholars that Pilate thought by excessive scourging and beating of Jesus the Jewish council would be satisfied. They weren't" (Frank C. Tribbe, *Portrait Of Jesus* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983)).

Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened… We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered… they

crucify… and part… casting lots… crucified… was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Mark's present tenses are arresting: "plaiting…they clothe him…they smote…" (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Mt. 27:38 RV has a similar dramatic change: "Then are there crucified with him…".

All men usually screamed out something, anything, in the hope that the lashing would therefore be shortened. The Lord's silence at this time would have been yet one more thing which awed His tormentors. There were runnels, Pollock says, in which the blood drained away. The scourging would already have been done twice for the thieves. The Angel watchers of the skies would have peered down into that blood, as they did in cherubic form into the blood on the mercy seat. The blood of the Son of God was treated by men as something ordinary, thoughtlessly mixed with that of criminals, and was trodden under foot. Perhaps it was to this aspect of the Lord's sufferings and insult that Heb. 10:29 refers to, in describing the crucifixion (and the Lord's *re-crucifixion* by fallen believers) as counting the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and thereby treading underfoot the Son of God (cp. Heb. 6:6 RV mg "*while* they crucify the son of God", suggesting that once this ongoing re-crucifixion stops, men can be forgiven). The despising and treading under of that blood in a literal sense only occurred at the scourging. It was observed by some first century writers that the length of time it took a crucifixion victim to die was related to the severity of the scourging. The Lord's relatively quick death may therefore (although not necessarily) reflect the brutality with which He was treated at this time. When Peter speaks of how we are healed by Christ's "stripes" (1 Pet. 2:24), uses an especially intense word to describe the scourging. It could be that he somehow saw or heard about the scourging, and saw it as parallel to Christ suffering for us "on the tree". The Lord's bloody sweat in Gethsemane has been identified as hemohidrosis, an extreme nervous state in which there is haemorrhage into the sweat glands, and therefore the skin becomes fragile and tender. This would have meant that flogging, the carrying of the cross and the constant friction between His back and the rough wood would have been agonizing. Hemohidrosis also produces severe chills. The Lord would have been shivering in the cold darkness of His final hours, with every involuntary movement causing agony to the nerves which the nails purposefully transfixed.

And delivered to be crucified- Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then

the cross was laid on that bare back. The word translated "delivered" or "betrayed" is commonly used in the records. Judas handed over the Lord to the Jews, the Jews handed Him over to Pilate and the Romans, and they handed Him back to the Jews to crucify. All this was only how things seemed on earth, because all was in the Father's hands. The Lord must surely have meditated upon this- that He was giving Himself, and they were merely the process He was using to do that.

The moment of the Lord being delivered over by Pilate is so emphasized. There are few details in the record which are recorded verbatim by all the writers (Mt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 23:25; Jn. 19:16). The Lord had prophesied this moment of handing over, as if this was something which He dreaded (Mk. 9:31; 10:33); that point when He was outside the legal process, and must now face His destruction. The Angels reminded the disciples: "Remember *how* he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men" (Lk. 24:6,7). The emphasis is on "*How*", with what passion and emphasis. Rom. 4:25 makes this moment of handing over equivalent to His actual death: " Who was *delivered* (s.w.) for our offences, and raised again for our justification". So much stress is put on this moment of being delivered over to crucifixion. The Gospel records stress that Pilate delivered Him up; but in fact God did (Rom. 8:32); indeed, the Lord delivered Himself up (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). Always the same word is used. These passages also stress that He delivered Himself up, and was delivered up, *for us*. It was *our salvation* which motivated Him at the moment of being delivered up. Perhaps it was at that moment that He had the greatest temptation to walk through the midst of them and back to Galilee. As the crowd surged forward and cheered, knowing they'd won the battle of wills with Pilate..."take ye him and crucify him" ringing in His mind... this was it. This was the end. How He must have been tempted to pray again His prayer: "Let this cup pass from me...". Jerusalem was a small town by modern standards, with no more than 10,000 inhabitants. There must have been faces in that crowd which, through swollen eyes, He recognized; some whose children had benefited from His miracles, whose ears had heard His discourses with wonderment. The emphasis on this moment of delivering up is so great that there must have been an especial sacrifice on the Lord's part. But He "gave himself up" to *God* not men (1 Pet. 2:23); He knew He was giving Himself as an offering to *God* as the crowd came forward and the soldiers once again led Him. The almost terrifying thing is that *we,* for the sake of our identity with Christ, are also "delivered up to death" (2 Cor. 4:11). We are asked to share, in principle, the height of devotion that He reached in that moment. Analysing 2 Cor. 4:10,11 in more detail, we find a number of parallels:

v. 10	v. 11

Always	For we which live are alway
bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus	delivered unto death for Jesus' sake
that the life also of Jesus	that the life also of Jesus
might be manifest in our body	might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

The second parallel is significant. To be delivered unto death for Jesus' sake is to bear about in an ongoing sense His crucifixion. This means that His being "delivered over" was seen by Paul as a cameo of His whole sufferings on the cross.

27:27 *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium*- Being Roman soldiers, these were likely Gentiles from many different nations within the Roman empire. The Lord was abused not only by Jews but by a wide range of Gentiles- the very ones for whom He was dying. When we do things in love for those who are in the throes of hatred against us (and many are in domestic situations where this has to be done by the believer in Christ)- then we are fellowshipping His sufferings at this time in this way.

And the whole battalion gathered around him- Similar to the way the record repeatedly stresses that *all* the chief priests, the *whole* Sanhedrin, condemned the Lord to death. The point is that group mentality is far more powerful than we think, and leads even good men like Nicodemus and Joseph, and perhaps the Centurion who came to confess that "Truly this was the Son of God", to do things which are far beyond the evil intention within any one individual mind. Again, we see in the crucifixion of Jesus where human nature leads in its ultimate end. It comes to full term in nothing less than the crucifixion of God's Son. One of the ways in which our nature operates is in tandem with others. Many have noted that the sum total of human evil in this world is likely more than the sum of all the individual 'evil' of every human being combined. The 'extra' factor in the equation is provided by the way in which humans in group mode can end up thinking and acting far more extremely than all the individual 'evil' within each of them as individuals. This is why the New Testament parable of 'satan' uses the term not only for individuals and for abstract human sin, but for sinful organizations and group entities. I have commented upon this several times throughout my *The Real Devil*.

"Gathered around Him" continues the theme of the Lord's passion causing men to gather and unite, either for Him or against Him. We note how John adds that Herod and Pilate were reconciled together- over the issue of Jesus. And this is what response to the fact of His suffering and death continues to do today. If we as believers are *not* united around Him, we are allowing our own traditions to become an obstacle to the process of

unity which the Lord's death is intended to achieve. Our refusal to unite, e.g. by forbidding brethren from communion and remembrance of Him, is to work against the intention of the cross.

27:28 *And they stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe*- Stripped naked? To be undressed is used by Paul as a metaphor for human death (2 Cor. 5:4 s.w.), and to be clothed upon is used by Paul to mean a change of nature. The Lord may have seen in this mockery a strange foretaste of the death and change of nature which awaited Him. Through all His sufferings, the hand of providence was giving Him encouragement. And that happens in our lives too. The Lord would've thought of His own story of the wounded man who was stripped (Lk. 10:30 s.w.). He was both the Samaritan Saviour and the wounded man, in that He identified so fully with us in our moral tragedy. The same LXX word is found in "They stripped Joseph out of his coat" (Gen. 37:23); was Joseph naked in the pit?

27:29 *And they plaited a crown of thorns and put it upon his head and a reed in his right hand, and they knelt down before him*- The thorns were growing between the cobbles of the courtyard? Or were they using thorns on their courtyard fire? The thorns on the head would have reminded Him that He was being temporarily overcome by the result of the curse in Eden. As with several aspects of His mocking, His tormentors unknowingly gave Him spiritual stimulus by what they did. His mind was certainly in Eden, for He spoke of the Kingdom as "paradise", with evident allusion to Eden (Lk. 23:43). Note that the Lord was beaten up at least three times: by the Jewish guards, by Herod's men and by the Roman soldiers. In a literal sense He was bruised for our iniquities, and chastised for us to obtain the peace of sin forgiven (Is. 53:5). And the Father surely foresaw all this back in Gen. 3:15, where the promised seed was to be *bruised*. He willed (*not* "pleased", as AV) this bruising, and this putting to grief (Is. 53:10). The parallel here between the bruising, beating and putting to grief may suggest that the beatings up ('bruisings') really grieved the Lord. And note that the final sacrifice of which Is. 53 speaks was not *only* achieved by the hours spent hanging on the cross. This earlier beating and abusing was just as much a part of His final passion, as, in essence, His whole life was a living out of the principles of the cross. It has been suggested that the crown of thorns was not only a mockery, but a significant part of the physical torture of crucifixion. If the net of nerves and veins under the skin of the scalp are pierced, profuse bleeding and stunning head ache would occur. His hair would therefore have been bloody. It would have been a wreath, a *stephanos* similar to that worn by Tiberius. The mock homage to the crowned Saviour-Lord was surely in the Lord’s mind at His ascension, when all the Angels of God bowed before Him in true worship (Heb. 1:6).
A reed- This is the same word translated "pen". The hint was that the

Lord was taking note. All was written and would be judged when the books are opened.

And mocked him- The Lord had foreseen that the Gentiles would "mock" Him (20:19 s.w.). Matthew gives more attention to the repeated mocking of the Lord than the other Gospels (27:29,31,41).

Saying: Hail, King of the Jews!- "Hail" is literally, 'Be happy'. J.D. Crossan mentions a Jewish tradition, quoting Mishnah passages to support it, that the bruised scapegoat had scarlet wool tied to it, and that the Jews spat on the scapegoat in order to place their sins upon it (J.D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994)). It could be that the Roman soldiers were doing all this in mockery of this tradition. It would have given the Lord something more to fill His holy mind with. He knew that He was actually doing what they were mockingly suggesting- carrying Israel's sins. God worked even through the spitting and mocking of men to work out the finest details of our redemption. The spitting is in the context of their mocking His Kingship. "Hail, King of the Jews!" was in parody of 'Ave, Caesar'. It was customary to give a kiss of homage to royalty. Their parody of this was to spit at Him, in the face, according to the type of Job 30:10. Earlier, at the trial, the Jews had spat in His face (Mt. 26:67). Now He tasted Roman spittle. And this was the face from which the glory of God had shone (Mk. 9:15?). One of the themes of the crucifixion records is that the same abuse and suffering was repeated to the Lord. Hence the frequent usage of the continuous tense. During the trial by Pilate, the Lord underwent mock worship and spitting (Jn. 19:3). Then later it was mock worship, spitting, hitting on the head (Mt. 27:29,30). And then hitting on the head, spitting, mock worship (Mk. 15:19,20). It seems they alternated bruising / spitting on Christ with bruising / kneeling before Him in mock homage. The reed was used as a mock diadem, although instead of touching His shoulder with it they hit Him on the head with it. They put it in His hand as a sceptre and then snatched it back to hit Him on the head with it. Wave after wave of the same treatment. Notice how many times the word "again" features in the Greek text (*palin*). This is the essence of our temptations. And it was a big theme in the Lord's final human experience. Likewise a comparison of the records shows that "Come down..." was clearly said more than once, the continuous tenses notwithstanding (Mt. 27:40 cp. Mk. 15:30). However, it is worth cataloguing the use of continuous tenses in this part of the record: The crowd *kept on* crying out (as demons did), "Crucify him" (Mt. 27:23); the soldiers *kept on* clothing Him (Mt. 27:28), *kept on* coming to Him and kept on saying... (Jn. 19:3 Gk.), Pilate *kept on seeking* (imperfect) to deliver the Lord (Jn. 19:12), thereby agitating the tension in the Lord's mind. They *kept on* kneeling (27:29), *kept on* spitting (v.30), *kept on* passing in front of Him on the cross and *kept on* shaking their heads (v. 39), *kept on* saying "...save thyself", *kept on* mocking and asking Him to

come down from the cross (vv. 40,41), the soldiers *kept on* coming to Him and offering Him their vinegar in mock homage (Lk. 23:36), they *kept on* offering Him the pain killer. They *kept on and on and on*. This is an undoubted theme.

The events of the crucifixion were so packed with fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy and shadows that the Lord's discernment of them must have given Him a wonderful boost of strength, in knowing who He was and where He was destined. For example, when they put a broken reed in his hand as a mock sceptre, His mind would have flown to the Messianic Is. 42:3: "A bruised reed shall he not break... he *shall* bring forth judgment", as they mocked Him for His apparent inability to do.

27:30 *And they spat upon him and took the reed and struck him on the head*- The question is to why Gentile soldiers would unleash such hatred upon Jesus, when the crucifixion of a Jew was just another job for them to do. We somehow do not imagine them doing this to the thieves or other crucifixion victims. I conclude that there was something in the Lord which forced men to either respond to Him, or go the other way in assuming that unless He was as He claimed, then He must be the worst of all and worthy of all hatred. We see the same effect upon men today, even if social norms mean that we express the passions [both for and against Him] in less dramatic and more restrained terms.

27:31 *And when they had mocked him, they took the robe from him and dressed him in his own garments*- The record that they put the Lord's own clothes on Him and then led Him to crucifixion conflicts with contemporary records of the victim being led out naked, or certainly without his own outer clothes. Christ was revealed, or 'revealed himself' (Gk.) on the cross, when He took away our sins (1 Jn. 3:5). This may be John referring to how he had witnessed Christ crucified naked. Yet we know that the Lord wore His outer robe right up to the impaling. It may be that the whipping and abuse He had suffered was far beyond what the soldiers had the right to minister. There were special directives concerning the need for the victim to die by crucifixion, not at the hands of the soldiers. It may be that they wanted to cover up the illegal marks on the body by making the Lord go to the cross fully dressed. In which case, again we see how He suffered the very *worst* of man's machinations. The Lord having His own clothes put back on Him meant that He would have been dressed in blood sprinkled garments for the walk to Golgotha. Again His holy mind would have been on the Messianic prophecies of Is. 63 about a Messiah with blood sprinkled garments lifted up in glorious victory. Or perhaps He saw the connection to Lev. 8:30, where the priests had to have blood sprinkled garments in order to begin their priestly work. This would have sent His mind to us, for whom He was interceding. Likewise when He perceived that His garment would not be rent, He would have

joyfully perceived that He was indeed as the High Priest whose garment was not to be rent (Ex. 39:23).

And led him away to crucify him- The Greek word translated "led away" is used about 10 times in the Gospels for the leading away of Jesus to death. It occurs in another context, in 7:13,14, where the Lord spoke of how wide and common is the way that 'leads away to' destruction compared to the way which 'leads away to' eternal life. He was being led away to destruction; He was sharing the path of all condemned sinners. This is a great theme of the crucifixion accounts- that the Lord identified totally with the position of condemned sinners. The logic is that by living the life of the flesh, we are led away to destruction; and yet by being led away to destruction with the Lord, in sharing His death, we are in fact being led away to life.

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your Bible readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all "to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6).
The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that

concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above. He turned and spoke to the women. Luke as a doctor knew that suffering makes one self-centred. It is perhaps because of this that he especially seems to concentrate on the wonder of the way in which the Lord looked out of His own agony to be so concerned with that of others. A.D. Norris has commented (*The Gospel Of Mark*): "It is he who reports the Lord's prayer for Simon Peter (22:31); who recounts the Lord's sympathetic warning to the women of Jerusalem (23:27-31); and who speaks of the Lord's forgiveness for His crucifiers, and remission for the penitent thief (23:34,43)".

27:32 *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name*-Cyrene was where there was a strongly orthodox Jewish community (cp. Acts 6:9). Simon was probably dark skinned, a countryman, a simple man, who had perhaps come up to Jerusalem in his zeal to keep Passover. What a comfort it was to the Lord to see a black man carrying His cross; for He had earlier said that *all* His true followers would carry the cross behind Him (Mt. 10:38; 16:24). The Hebrew writer seemed to see Simon as typical of us all when writing of how we must go out of the city with the Lord, "bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:12,13, probably using 'reproach' as a parallel to 'the cross'). He would have seen in Simon a prototype of all His future, suffering, humiliated followers; "impressed" by the predestined calling, almost against our will, to carry His cross (Mt. 27:32 RV mg.). And was it accident that this prototype was almost certainly a black man, when perhaps ultimately it may appear that a large proportion of the faithful body of the Lord Jesus will have been black people? If indeed Simon was a black Jew (cp. modern Falashas) who had come up to keep the Passover, it would have been annoying beyond words for him to be made unclean by the blood of the Lord, which was inevitably on the stake after His first attempt at bearing it after His flogging. Not to mention the shame for a zealous Jew in having to carry the cross of this Jesus of Nazareth. Yet it would seem that he was later converted, and he in turn converted his wife and son (Mk. 15:21 cp. Rom. 16:13). Mark rarely records proper nouns, but he makes a special effort to mention that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It would therefore seem that these men were well known in the early church. Simon may be the "Simeon called Niger" ('the black one') of Acts 13:1. He is listed there next to Lucius, who was also from Cyrene. The thief and the centurion were likewise converted, and the faith of Joseph, Nicodemus and probably others was brought out into the open by the cross. Like Samson, the Lord won victories even in His death. The spiritual turn-around in Simon is a type of what is experienced by all whom the Lord compels to carry His cross. He was passing by, going somewhere else, full of his own plans, going about to establish his own righteousness... and then, out of the blue, he was called to what he much later realized was the greatest honour a man could be called to: to accompany the Son of God and carry His cross, right to the end. We are left to imagine him plonking it down, as if to say to Jesus 'Now you've got to do the rest', and then slipping off into the crowd.

Another reading of Simon is possible. Simon is a Greek name, and the names of his sons are Greco-Roman. The way he is described as "coming out of the field" (Lk. 23:26) could imply that he was working, doing what was improper on a feast day, because he was a Gentile. It could be that he simply lived and worked near Jerusalem, he wasn't a religious guy, and like Saul out looking for lost cattle, he was going some place else…until the Lord as it were arrested him with the message of the cross.

Whom they forced to carry the cross-"The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck

and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar" (W.D. Edwards, *On The Physical Death Of Jesus Christ*, JAMA March 21 1986, Vol. 255 No. 11). This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

John says that the Lord went out bearing His cross. Luke says that Simon was asked to carry the hinder part of the cross behind Him. Matthew and Mark say Simon carried the cross. Mk. 15:22 (Gk.) says that the soldiers carried Jesus to Golgotha. J.B. Phillips renders it: "They got him to a place Golgotha". It would seem that the Lord collapsed, perhaps fainting. If He was crucified on an olive tree (excavations of crucified men suggest this is what was used), it would not have been simply because of the weight of the stake. Take a picture of Him lying there, with the face that was marred more than the children of men pressed into the hot dust of that Jerusalem street. And some human fool probably said something like 'Come on, get up' (doubtless with embellishments). If indeed He did faint, there would have been that sense of 'coming round', the "Where am I?", the memory and consciousness flooding back. "Have I died and been resurrected?" No, as some nameless soldier kicked Him and told Him to get up.

John's statement that "He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to

assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* (Jn. 17:13) just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, " my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing", " my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

27:33 *And when they came to a place called*- He didn't carry His cross all the way to Golgotha; He went out of the guard room with His face set towards Golgotha, as it had been so visibly set on Jerusalem a few weeks before. Note the emphasis on "unto", "to", "the place". They arrived. They stopped there. This was it. They arrived at the destination. "Outside the city walls was permanently located the heavy upright wooden stipes, on which the patibulum [which Christ carried] would be secured" (Edwards *op cit*). The Lord would doubtless have meditated upon it. The cross was waiting. All He had to do was carry the cross bar. His invitation to men to carry the cross to the place where the other part of that instrument of death was already prepared must be seen in this light. The way for our self-crucifixion is prepared. We carry but the cross bar.

Golgotha, that is to say, the place of a skull- Possibly meaning 'The skull of Goliath'. In this case, we have opened up a detailed typological meaning to David's victory over Goliath. He was there as the Lord Jesus fighting sin, and then burying the head of Goliath, the 'man of sin', near Jerusalem.

Luke adds that He turned and spoke to the women on the walk to Golgotha; He looked out of His own agony to the needs of others. This is another theme of the cross. He was even thoughtful for weak Pilate (Jn. 19:11); for the thief, for the forgiveness of those mocking soldiers, for His mother, for John, for those women lining the Via Dolorosa... And those women, He said, would be destroyed in the condemnation of Jerusalem in AD70. Phil. 2:2-4 makes the point that the essence of the cross is in the way the Lord's mind was so full of concern for *others* throughout the whole wretched process. The Lord's Bible-filled mind would have been aware of Jer. 9:20-22, which prophesied special woe to women in the holocaust of AD70. Those women were condemned. Yet the Lord turned, in His desperate agony, to speak to them. I admit, as I must through every stage of the cross, that I wouldn't have done this. I wouldn't have bothered with them. But He made such effort to at least try to get them to change their minds. They were weeping for Him, but He knew they would not obey His command to leave Jerusalem when it would be surrounded by armies. Neither would their children. On a human level, they must have been so annoying. Young women (if they were alive in AD70 40 years later), probably passively in love with Him, moved to tears at His passion but with no regard for His words and the real implications of His cross. Yet still He tried for them, running the risk of cat calls of 'You can't carry your own cross but you can talk to the girls'.
"If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; his quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel…? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

If the crossbeam was tied to the nape of the Lord’s neck, it would have been impossible for Him to turn round and talk, as it is specifically stated

that He did. I would reconstruct that the Lord collapsed, and Simon was forced to carry the cross, whilst the Lord followed on, scarcely conscious. Before collapsing again, with the result that He was carried to the cross, He used His last and final energy at the time to speak to those women. He used His last bit of mental and physical strength to preach- to women whom He knew were not going to really respond. For He said they should weep for themselves, He knew they would not listen to His warning to flee Jerusalem in AD70. But such was His hopefulness for people, that He still made the effort to communicate rather than get lost within Himself and His own thoughts as I would have tended to.

27:34 *They gave him wine to drink mingled with gall. And when he had tasted it, he would not drink it*- To give strong drink to those ready to perish was a well-known custom at crucifixion. The fact victims survived two or three days was only because they were given drink. The Lord didn't simply refuse the pain killer. He took it, tasted it, and then refused it. Why did He first taste it? Surely He knew the custom, and He knew what it was. Various alternatives arise in the mind, each a source of devotional inspiration:

- Was it that His eyesight was damaged by the punches and He didn't see what it was until He tasted it? "When Jesus therefore saw his mother..." may suggest that He didn't initially recognize her. The Messianic Scriptures mention the affliction of eyesight in Messiah's final suffering. Early crucifixion art shows the Lord with His right eye damaged (as does the Turin shroud). The mucous membrane (the thin slippery tissues which lubricate the human body) would have dried so that “they rip layers of tissues from the eyes every time the pupil is moved or blinked" (C.M. Ward).
- Maybe He realized as He had the cup on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain.
- Another explanation is that He wanted to speak out loud, saying (several times?) "Father, forgive them", and to perhaps recite Psalm 22. He was so parched from thirst (He had lost body fluid in Gethsemane) that He knew He couldn't speak out loud without some liquid. The dehydration would have made His tongue thicken so that speech was eventually almost impossible. But He only drank enough to moisten His throat, not to deaden any pain. This shows the majestic self-mastery within the Lord; He knew just when to stop, even though it must have been so tempting to keep on drinking.
- Taking the pain killer would not have been a sin, neither would it have theologically damaged the atonement. Perhaps the Lord took it, as doubtless the others did, and then had the self-control to think better of it and give it back. Such was His devotion to the absolute height of identity

with us. It makes His action all the more poignant if He first tasted and then refused, rather than just refusing outright.

He was *repeatedly* offered the pain killer, the tense implies. Men offering Him myrrh in (mock) homage would have sent His mind back to the story dear Mary had told Him about the wise men bringing myrrh. And inevitably her tortured mind would have gone back there too. But I have another suggestion. When we read that "someone" offered him a sponge with wine mixed with myrrh (Mk. 15:36; Mt. 27:48), we recall the use of myrrh in preparing bodies for burial (Mk. 14:3; Lk. 23:56; Jn. 12:3; 19:39). Pliny (*Natural History* 14.15.92,107) records: "The finest wine in early days was that spiced with the scent of myrrh… I also find that aromatic wine is constantly made from almost the same ingredient as perfumes, from myrrh". This alerts me to the real possibility that the unnamed bystander who did this was Mary Magdalene. Earlier she had anointed the Lord's body with myrrh "to the burial". And now she has prepared the most expensive form of wine as some sort of pain killer. Perhaps the Lord was so touched by this that He accepted it, but didn't drink it. His doing this is otherwise very hard to understand. Her love was on one hand inappropriate, and yet the Lord still accepted it, even though He couldn't use it. He could have felt angry with her for tempting Him to the easier way. But He didn't. And in so doing He showed her that the essence of the cross is that there is no easy way. The principles of all this are to be reflected in our cross carrying.

Another alternative presents itself from the Hebrew text of Ps. 69:21: "They gave me also gall". The Hebrew can stand the translation 'poison' (see RSV). Given the extended, agitated torture of crucifixion, there was a custom for close friends to get close enough to the cross to lift up a poisonous substance which the crucified would lick, and thereby die quickly. It is just possible that a friend (or even his mother?) or a sympathetic soldier did this. Again, in this case it would seem that the Lord chose the highest level; our salvation would surely have been theologically achievable if He had taken it. But He chose to attain for us not only salvation, but "such *great* salvation" (Heb. 2:3) by always taking the highest level. He became obedient not only to death, but "even the death of the cross".

One feels that Christ would have been justified in accepting the pain killer that was offered Him in His final agony; but He refused it, it seems to me, in order to achieve the *greatest* salvation for us. He never once used what I have called the principle of Jephthah's vow. In the same spirit, some faithful men of old refused legitimate deliverance from torture so that they might obtain "a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35). The record of the cross is full of examples of where the Lord in physical terms rejected legitimate comforts in His final hours. Yet throughout His life, He was ever ready to concede to the weakness of those who would genuinely follow

Him. The way He spoke about demons without giving His hearers a lecture about the folly of such belief is proof of this. He could have insisted, as we do, on the rejection of such superstitions. But this was not His way. I am not suggesting that *we* have the right to make such concessions in our preaching and baptizing. But He did.

27:35 *And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots*- "And it was the third hour and (not 'when') they crucified Him" (Mk. 15:25) suggests they were waiting for the hour to come. It was in their brief to do it at the third hour. It may be that they got there a little early, and there was an agonizing wait for the third hour. Mark 15 has so many usages of the word "and"; circle them in your Bible (especially AV). This is to emphasize the relentlessness of it all, the repetition of everything, the way it droned remorselessly on. This is a feature of the cross, which we must carry. The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this...or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm…four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.
The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just

a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus (presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did.

Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples. The spiritual culture of Almighty God is also shown by the way in which although *all* the Council (Mk. 14:64), including Joseph, condemned Christ to death by crucifixion, God overlooks Joseph's lack of boldness in not contesting this, and speaks of him in such glowing spiritual terms. His 'not consenting unto' Christ's death was deep within him. I would be inclined to say: 'The *least* you could have done was to have abstained from the vote'. But the record is far more positive than that.

For want of a better way of putting it, the spiritual culture of God comes through so sublimely in these records. He began His written revelation with the comment, as an almost throw-away clause, that "He made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16). The vastness of that creation, far more wondrous and extensive than just this planet, is treated *en passant*. The actual resurrection of the Lord Jesus is likewise not recorded; we only learn of it from the recorded witness of those who went to the tomb, and who later met the Lord. The uninspired *Gospel of Peter* 39-42 does record the actual arising of the Lord's dead body; but immediately it becomes

evident that this isn't inspired, simply because of the lack of spiritual culture which we are accustomed to in the inspired writings. Likewise it has been observed that God uses "an economy of miracle" when He has acted openly. The record of the disciples' baptism, whether and how the Lord met His mother after the resurrection (for surely He did), Saul changing his name to Paul, Aaron's repentance after the golden calf- all these things are left unrecorded. The Gospel writers do not praise the majestic temple and city of Jerusalem in any way, unlike the uninspired contemporary writers. And that same spiritual culture comes out especially in the account of the crucifixion. It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker").

Divided His garments- There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide. The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed

worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked. There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews (Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68):

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law an accuses us of playing false... he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's... in His opinion we are counterfeit...and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies*. Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.
By casting lots- Did they throw the die on top of His outer garment? Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all

too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered “disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether “Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. ''When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord’s executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn’t struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia word seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbed in the Lord’s vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four

actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects…an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the malcirculation of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief (see 54), He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which

He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

It is one of the greatest internal proofs of inspiration that this climactic act is recorded by each of the Gospel writers as a participial or subordinate clause. The concentration is on the splitting up of the clothes, which happened, of course, after the impaling. It is as if the record at this point is from the perspective of the soldiers. Get the job done, and *then*, on with the important bit!- the dividing of the clothes! No human author would ever have written like this. It's rather like the way Mary thinks that the risen Lord is a gardener. There is something artless and utterly Divine about it all. The record is full of what I would call spiritual culture. It has the hallmark of the Divine. This may be why some of the 'obvious' fulfilments of prophecy aren't mentioned, e.g. Is. 53:7 concerning the Lamb dumb before her shearers. Likewise there is no record of the faithful women weeping, or moaning as the body was taken down.

27:36 *And they sat there*- "And they sat down" after symbolically killing Joseph. "Sitting down *they* watched *him* there". Mark particularly has an abnormal number of pronouns throughout the record. The emphasis is on " he... him... his"; also " they" occurs more than average. The contrast is being established between the crucified Christ and the world. If we are to identify with His cross, it is axiomatic that there must be a thorough separation from this world (Gal. 1:4).

And watched him- In the sense of guarding Him, rather than simply staring at Him. Matthew and Mark discuss the placing of the placard out of sequence, in order to emphasize how they did the Son of God to death, and then got on with splitting up His few clothes. The petty materialism of man was played out just a metre or two from the suffering Saviour, while He saw saying (repeatedly, the Greek could imply), "Father, forgive them"; with all the pain of speech which the crucified position involved. There were four soldiers, and they each took a part of His clothing: His

head covering, belt, inner coat, His sandals. Those Galilean sandals, that had walked so many miles. He went about doing good, and healing... They kneeled on His chest and nailed Him, slung the mallets back into their packs, and straight away got on with arguing about who was going to keep those worn out shoes. One wonders whether the soldier wore them or sold them. Or kept them. And we must look at our petty materialism in the light of the cross, reflecting on the power of mammon: to eclipse the vision of the cross, to silence men from speaking of the wonder of the resurrection (Mt. 28:14)- to entice a man to betray the Lord of all grace (Mt. 26:15 implies Judas' motivation was financial, first and foremost). Long hours, demanding hours, striving for well-paid careers... all so we can have a nice car, a house, not a flat, in a nice area, so we can wear nice fitting clothes, so we can eat food which tickles the taste buds, rather than food which gives the basic proteins and vitamins etc. We do all this. Almost all of us. At the foot of the cross. Ignoring what it really means. And even worse: we excuse ourselves rather than admit our guilt. The records of the writing of the inscriptions may also be out of place in order to create the picture of all the people sitting watching the Lord Jesus, with that title over Him. The other two were there, but the people all watched Jesus. He was lifted up, and He drew all men (all men's eyes, in the primary sense) unto Him (Jn. 12:32). And the cross has that same magnetism today.

27:37 *And over his head they put the written accusation against him, which read*- This is out of sequence; the inscription was placed at the actual impalement (according to the other Gospels). Luke seems to imply that the mocking was because of this placard; it must have been a very unusual crime to die for, contrasting sharply with the usual reasons for death which were displayed on crosses.

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews- Not only was the Lord's death ongoing during His life. It was normal to write over the crucified 'This *was...*'. But over the Lord it was written: 'This *is* Jesus', as if for all time, this was His memorial to all generations.

Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name

was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare His righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him…in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

Ps. 40:9,10 speaks of how the Lord Jesus would proclaim righteousness to the *ekklesia* and declare God's faithfulness and salvation, i.e. the things of His Name. Yet this passage is quoted in Heb. 10:5-7 about the cross. It was there above all that "thy law is within my heart" and He "preached righteousness". This is why Paul can talk of "the preaching [which is] the cross". He as He was there is the ultimate witness. And this was why the Yahweh Name was written up over Him.

Note that Lk. 22:36,38 record that the inscription on the cross was "also" written- connecting with how the soldiers "also" mocked Him. The inscription was intended as another mockery; but it was a vital part in declaring God's glory. The incident is typical of how those things which seem the most negative and unspiritual are used by the Father to His and our glory in the end.

27:38 *Two robbers were crucified with him*- Mt. 27:38 RV has a dramatic change of tense: "Then are there crucified with him…". Mark's present tenses are also arresting: "plaiting… they clothe him… they smote…" (:17,19 RV). Perhaps Mark is seeking consciously to make us imagine it all as going on before our eyes. Take just Mk. 15:23-26: "They offered… they crucify… and part… casting lots… crucified… was written". These arresting changes are surely to encourage us to re-live it all. Mark speaks of "they crucify him", going on to say that "then are there two crucified with him" (Mk. 15:38 RV), whereas Luke records the act in the past tense. Significantly, very few actual details are given by the Gospel writers of both the scourging and the crucifixion. It could be that they felt

it impossible to dwell upon these things; or it could be that they and their readers knew what was involved in these practices, and we are left to dwell upon them in our own imagination. We are intended to reconstruct in our own minds what may have happened… We have a solemn duty towards Him to do this. This is perhaps why the tenses change so dramatically in the records.

One on his right hand and one on his left- The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb…for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus- that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery. Some of the legal terms used in the NT for our redemption imply that Christ redeemed us from slavery through His death. And yet one could redeem a slave by oneself becoming a slave (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Gal. 3:13; 4:5). This is why the crucified Jesus is typified by the suffering servant / slave of Isaiah's prophesies. And Paul seems to have risen up to something similar when he speaks of giving his body to be branded, i.e. becoming a slave (1 Cor. 13:3 Gk.).

27:39 *And they that passed by*- The idea of crucifixion was that it was public. The invitation to carry the Lord's cross is an invitation to likewise be public and open in our identification with Him. But these people repeated the false accusation raised in the Sanhedrin trial, that the Lord had planned to destroy the temple (:40). One wonders, therefore, whether these people were indeed passers by. To have access to that information means they may have been close to the Jewish leadership. Perhaps they simply made out that they were 'passers by', and the Biblical record is at times written from the standpoint of how things appear to men, even if that is not the actual case [consider the language of demons]. Or it could be that these people continually passed back and

forth in front of the Lord in order to try to provoke Him repeatedly with their blasphemy.

“Those that passed by" were not only comprised of casual passers-by who thought "Hey, there's a crucifixion, let's go and have a look". Golgotha was a little way out of the city. The size of the crowd must have been considerable; "crowds came to the spectacle" (Lk. 23:48 Gk.). It seems more reasonable that the reference is to those who passed by, back and forth (the Greek could imply), 'passing along' (Mk. 15:29) in front of the cross, taunting the Lord, as if they were making a wave offering in front of the presence of God in the crucified Christ. The connection between Ps. 22:7 and Mt. 27:39 would suggest that these 'passers-by' were there with the express intent of taunting Him. Because His eyes were inevitably downward, it would have been difficult for the Lord not to look at them. Their words were exactly those of the Sanhedrin (Mt. 26:61), so presumably they came from there- the work colleagues of Joseph and Nicodemus.

*Derided him, wagging their heads***-** The reproach broke the Lord's heart (Ps. 69:20). It could even be that He suffered a heart rupture, a literal broken heart, some hours prior to His death- hence when His side was pierced, blood flowed out- and corpses don’t usually bleed. It has been commented that severe emotional trauma is enough to cause such a rupture. He wasn't hard and impervious to it all. He knew who He was, and where He was going. To be treated as He was, was such an insult to the God of all grace. And He keenly sensed this. Heb. 12:2,3 parallels the Lord's enduring of the cross with His enduring "such contradiction of sinners against Himself". These mockings were therefore part of "the cross". The "cross" process began before His impalement; in the same way as some verses which evidently concern the crucifixion are applied to the Lord's earlier life. His was *a life* of cross carrying. And we are asked to live the same life, not just the occasional 'cross' of crisis, but a life embodying the cross principles. As "the cross" means more than the impalement which epitomized it, likewise "the blood of Christ" means far more than the red liquid. These concepts found their physical epitome in the crucifixion process, but there is so much more to these things than the physical. The blood of the covenant, the Son of God and the Spirit of grace are bracketed together in Heb. 10:29. The Lord *was* His blood. The pouring out of blood from His side, the trickles down His cheeks from the crown of thorns, quickly drying in the hot dust beneath... this was *Him*. We take the wine in memory of *Him*; not just His blood. And He *is* the Spirit of God's grace. By Himself He purged our sins (Heb. 1:3); and yet this purging was through His blood (Heb. 9:14). He was His blood; His cross was the essence of all He was.

27:40 *And saying: You that would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days*- This would have reminded Him that He was doing this to

Himself, they weren't doing it to Him. He knew that the temple would be ripped apart stone by stone. And so He knew the temple of His body must be, for in that body He bore our sins on the tree. He had foretold that the tabernacle of His body would be 'taken down' as that in the wilderness was, taken apart piece by piece. In that lengthy procedure He had seen foretold the excruciating nature of His death, as every aspect of humanity was taken apart. "...and buildest it in three days" would have taken His mind forward to that certain future. So their taunt would have aided His efforts to remain spiritual. Likewise their allusions to Ps. 22 ("He trusted in God...") served to steer the Lord's mind there, and to take comfort from the rest of the Psalm and the context of their mocking quotations. Yet even in the mocking, the Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This is exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles. The darkness that came down would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

Save yourself- All the emphasis on save *yourself* was a temptation for Him to forget *us*. He would have reflected that He was saving Himself and us by staying where He was; coming down from the cross wouldn't lead to salvation. What the flesh understands by salvation and what the spirit understands by it are vastly different.

If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross- A repeat of the wilderness temptation to come down from the temple pinnacle. This temptation was at the hands of the Jews, and there is every reason to think that the wilderness temptations likewise were somehow involved with the Jewish satan. The Lord had likened His death on the cross, His giving of His flesh for the life of the world, to the coming down of manna from Heaven (Jn. 6:50,51,58). 'Coming down' was the classic language of

theophany and God manifestation; the Lord's ascension was on the very basis that He had indeed 'come down' (Eph. 4:10). And He was indeed 'coming down', not a mere meter or so from the stake to the ground, but from Heaven to earth- for their salvation. Time and again the situations associated with the Lord's suffering were full of reference to His earlier teachings and beliefs. He was thus confirmed by the hand of providence in the path He had taken, realizing that this was not at all 'bad luck' or a suffering to simply be endured, but rather every detail of it was under God's hand controlled to confirm Him in His path to glory.

"Come down from the cross" was a repeat of the second temptation: Come down from the temple tower; throw yourself to death in Gehenna below, and perhaps the Angels will even then save you. This had been a temptation to commit suicide, to give up life without giving it for His friends, and hope that somehow the Angels would save Him personally. Victory in one temptation leads to victory again and again. All the wilderness temptations recurred during the crucifixion. Notice how the three temptations of Jesus in the desert are repeated in the three mockeries of Him on the cross recorded in Matthew and Luke. The comment that the devil departed from Him "for a season" may imply 'he' returned at the cross. And clearly enough, the temptations at the end were internal, even if voiced by an external person.

27:41 *In like manner also the chief priests with the Scribes and elders mocked him, saying*- Matthew and Mark record the same incident. The priests said among themselves (Mk.); Matthew implies they said it to Him. They spoke in mock whispers, huddled in their group, but loud enough for Him to hear. Many of "the elders" believed in Him (Jn. 12:42), but were led to this awful behaviour by the need to keep up appearances and the fear of exclusion from the synagogue.

27:42 *He saved others*- A tacit recognition that His healing miracles and the resurrection of Lazarus were undeniable. "He saved others" would have been a reference to Lazarus. His was a well-known case among the Jews (was Lazarus there? It would have been strange if He had not been). The Lord's mind would have choked at the memory of dear Lazarus, Martha, Mary, the now shattered family whom He had loved and still loved.

He cannot save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in him- RV "He is the King of Israel..." - His claims to Kingship, and the claim of His placard, was a repeated jibe. It must have seemed so incongruous that this wretchedly suffering man actually thought Himself to be a King. "If... let him come down" may have been followed by a pause: is He going to do anything? In their hearts they must have known that He had had the ability to pull off this kind of thing. Those silent pauses must have been an agony for the Lord. There were probably many in that crowd half sympathetic to His

wretched cause, who, on the surface, really might have believed if He had come down. But He had learned the lesson in the Galilee days, that impressive miracles didn't really instil faith (Pentecostals etc. still fail to realize this).

The mocking Jews fall strangely silent in the crucifixion accounts. The Lord had plainly foretold that when they had lifted up the Son of man, then they would know "that I am he", and would recognize His Divine Sonship (Jn. 8:27). There was something about the vision of Christ crucified which convicted them of their folly and of the Divinity of God's Son. And that power burns on today.

27:43 *He trusts in God*- As in :42 "He saved others", a tacit recognition that He had indeed trusted in God.

Let Him deliver him now- Perhaps mocking the Lord's model prayer, "Deliver us from evil". If so, this is an indication of how well known the Lord's teachings had become. Even the elders knew the content of His model prayer.

If He desires him- ***They were alluding to the LXX of Ps. 18:19 and 91:11. God cannot be tempted, otherwise He would have responded. 'If God*** **likes** ***Him', is what they were really implying.***
For he said: I am the Son of God- The Lord is never recorded as actually saying that in so many words. He preferred to leave His works and character to show that fact. And these learned men showed ignorance of the most basic Bible teaching- that God does not immediately deliver His children from their crises, nor does His apparent silence mean that He does not love them.

27:44 *And the robbers also that were crucified with him cast upon him the same reproach*- The same word is used of how these reproaches were actually against God, but they as it were fell upon the Lord (Rom. 15:3). In this we see the intensity of God's manifestation in his crucified Son. Paul quotes this in the context of appealing for our patience with the weak, knowing we are living out the spirit of the crucified Christ in our patient bearing with them (Rom. 15:1). Perhaps Paul specifically has in mind how the Lord was patient with the thieves, the weak, who reproached Him; and that patience paid off, in that one of them was converted to such an extent that he was assured of final salvation.

The intellectuals in concentration camps were often mocked and hated by the other inmates until they came down to their level. It is, apparently, an almost natural reaction. It explains another concentration camp phenomenon- that victims often cooperate with their persecutors in crimes against other victims; the weak join with the strong to persecute others who are weak. This, on a psychological level, helps to explain why

the later-repentant thief should speak like this. And yet the Lord bore with him, and His patience led to the man's conversion and salvation. They were men at the very limit of human experience. The self-respect of Jesus would have been most unusual; the purpose of the crucifixion process was to drive this out. He knew Who He was, and where He was going. Josephus describes how those on trial with the threat of crucifixion hanging over them did all that they could to appeal for mercy. The thieves probably did this. This is why the Jews were so scandalized when the Lord refused to answer for Himself, and then calmly stated that He was the Messiah who would come to them in judgment at the last day (Mt. 26:64,65); He was speaking the very blasphemy which they were trying so unsuccessfully to convict Him of. We can be sure that they and the soldiers tried especially hard to drive the self-respect from Him: which in His case would have meant resigning His belief that He was the spotless Son of God. This would explain why the soldiers mocked Him as they did, and why the onlooking Jews did so: unconsciously, they wanted to bring Him down to their level. The fact the Lord didn't descend to their level is yet another mark of the extent of His victory. It was the same temptation as 'Come down from the cross'; 'Come down to our level, the level of desperate men, just concentrating on hanging here and shifting the weight around between hands and feet, hands and feet, hands and feet...'. You know how it is when you are carrying a very heavy load. You just concentrate on carrying it. You pant and sweat and don't care if you bump into somebody or tread on a child's toy. Those men were on that level. The Lord was in the same physical situation, but somehow He rose above, He didn't descend to the animal, mindless level. Thank you, Lord, that for *my* sake You didn't.

27:45 *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour*- The only other Biblical reference to the sixth and ninth hours together is again in Matthew, and again on the lips of the Lord. It is when He spoke of how the householder went out at the sixth and ninth hours to desperately appeal for labourers to come and work for Him (20:5). This connection surely cannot be so arbitrary. The Lord intended that each waypoint or landmark in the crucifixion process would be an appeal to us to break out of our lethargy and come forward and serve Him in practice.

Darkness is often associated in the OT with mourning. Am. 8:9,10 speaks of earthquake and darkness at noon because "I will make it as the mourning for an only son, and the end thereof as a bitter day", i.e. a funeral. The darkness was a sign of *Almighty God mourning for His Son*.

27:46 *And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice: Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*- The Greek seems to mean "Why *did You* forsake me", perhaps implying

that He had already overcome the feeling of being forsaken. Mark records "Eloi"; Matthew "Eli". Why? There *is* a difference. Did He say "Eli, Eli, Eloi, Eloi”? Four times calling upon God? We are going to suggest that these words indicate a crisis in the mind of the Lord Jesus. We would wish to write in almost every sentence of this study that the Lord Jesus was utterly sinless. Yet as one tempted to the limit, He must have come close to the edge. One of the superlative marvels of the Lord in His death was the way He never seems to have lost His spiritual composure, despite every physical and mental assault. Yet in these words we have Him perhaps nearer to such a breakdown of composure than anywhere else. Another example of His being 'close to the edge' was when He was in the Garden, asking for the cup to be taken away from Him. Compare those words with His clear understanding that He would have to die on a cross and later be resurrected. The clarity of His understanding is to be marvelled at. He went to the cross “knowing all things that should come upon him" (Jn. 18:4). He not only foresaw His death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, but many other details besides. Thus He spoke of how He was like a seed which would be buried in a *garden* (as He was) and then rise again (Lk. 13:19). But compare all this with His plea for another way to be found in Gethsemane, and also the cry "Why hast thou forsaken me?". There is only one realistic conclusion from this comparison: those words indicate a faltering in the Lord Jesus, a blip on the screen, a wavering in purpose. One marvels that there were not more such occasions recorded.

The first blip on the screen was in Gethsemane. The second one was when He cried "Why have You forsaken me?". We should remind ourselves of the chronology of events around the crucifixion (1):

14th Nissan	**9p.m.**	**Last Supper**
12p.m.	Arrest	
9a.m. (the third hour”)	Crucifixion	
12a.m. - 3p.m. ("sixth to the ninth hour")	Darkness	
3p.m. ("the ninth hour")	Death; Passover lambs killed	
15th Nissan	9p.m.	Israel eat Passover
16th Nissan	6p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends
5a.m.	Resurrection?	
6a.m.	Women at the tomb	
3p.m.	Walk to Emmaus	

The fact is, Christ died "at the ninth hour". It was at the ninth hour that he cried "It is finished" and "Father into thy hands I commend my spirit". Yet it was also *at* the ninth hour that He said "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mk. 15:34). The conclusion is that *at the very last moment* our Lord faltered. It was 11:59, and He faltered. Enter, *please*, into the sense of crisis and intensity. This is the only time that he prays to God as "God" rather than "Father" / *abba*. This itself reflects the sense of distance that enveloped Him. For He was your Lord and your Saviour hanging there, it was your salvation which hung in the balance. There is a very telling point to be made from Mt. 27:46. There we read that at "*about* the ninth hour, Jesus cried" those words about being forsaken. Mark says it was at the ninth hour, and we know it was at the ninth hour that Christ uttered His final words of victory. Yet it must have been only a few minutes before the ninth hour when Christ faltered; hence Matthew says that it was "*about* the ninth hour". What is a few minutes? Only a few hundred seconds, only moments. Only moments before the sweetness of the final victory, "It is finished" or accomplished, the Son of God was faltering. The more we appreciate this wavering at the last minute, the more fully we will appreciate the power and sense of victory behind Christ's final two sayings on the cross, uttered only moments later.

And so we come to the crux of the problem. How and why was Christ forsaken by the Father? Ultimately, of course, the Father did not forsake the Son in His time of greatest need and agony. I would suggest that Christ only *felt* forsaken; although if you *feel* forsaken, in a sense you are forsaken. The prototype of Christ feeling forsaken was in David feeling forsaken by God when he fled from Absalom (Ps. 42:9; 43:2; 88:14); but clearly he was not actually forsaken. But *why* did our Lord falter like this, at 11:59, one minute to twelve, at this agonizing last moment? Seeing the Father did not forsake the Son, there seems to have been some kind of intellectual failure in the Lord's reasoning. In the terrible circumstances in which He was, this is hardly surprising. Yet such genuine intellectual failure, a real, unpretended failure to correctly understand something, usually has a psychological basis. The Lord, it seems to me, *feared death more than any other man*. He knew that death was separation from God, the wages of sin. Different people have varying degrees of fear of death (e.g. the unrepentant thief was totally resigned to it). It would seem that the Lord had the highest conceivable level of unresignation to death, to the point of being almost paranoid about it- even though He knew He must die. Two prototypes of the Lord had similar experiences. Abraham suffered "an horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:12), in an event rich in reference to the crucifixion. And Job's sufferings were the very things which he "greatly feared" (Job 3:25). The Lord stood as a lamb dumb before His shearers; and the lamb is struck dumb with fear. This all makes the Lord's death *for us* so much the more awesome.

We have elsewhere commented concerning the possibility that Christ felt that although He would be tied to the cross as Isaac was, yet somehow He would be delivered. Gen. 22:22 LXX speaks of Abraham not withholding his son- and the same word is found in Rom. 8:32 about God 'not sparing' His own son. Clearly the offering of Isaac is to be understood as prophetic of the Lord's sacrifice. The Lord's growing realization that the entangled ram represented Him rather than Isaac would have led to this sense of panic which He now expressed. There is more evidence than we sometimes care to consider that Christ's understanding was indeed limited; He was capable of misunderstanding Scripture, especially under the stress of the cross. Earlier, in the garden, He had panicked; He was "sore amazed" (Mk. 14:33, s.w. "greatly wondering", Acts 3:11).

This desire for personal deliverance from the cross would have been there within our Lord throughout the six hours He hung there. And yet His only other earlier utterances which are recorded are all concerned with the welfare of others; us, the Jews, the thief, His mother. He supremely mastered His own flare of panic and desire for His personal salvation and relief, subjecting it to His spiritual and practical concern for others.

A study of Psalm 22 indicates deeper reasons why Christ felt forsaken. He had been crying out loud for deliverance, presumably for some time, according to Ps. 22:1-6, both during and before the unnatural three hour darkness. He felt that His desire for deliverance was not being heard, although the prayers of others had been heard in the past when they cried with a like intensity. The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). It may be helpful to summarize the two strands of Bible teaching concerning being forsaken:

God will not forsake His people if they are righteous
"When thou art in tribulation... and shalt be obedient unto his voice... he will not forsake thee" (Dt. 4:18,19)
"The Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Dt. 31:6)
"The Lord will not forsake His people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22)

"If thou wilt walk in my statutes... and keep all my commandments to walk in them... I will not forsake my people" (1 Kings 6:12,13)
"Blessed is the man (Messiah) whom thou chastenest... for the Lord will not cast off his people, neither forsake his inheritance... all the upright in heart" (Ps. 94:12-15)
"When the poor and needy seek water... I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them" (Is. 41:17); i.e. God not forsaking was shown in His answering of prayer (cp. Ps. 22:1-11).

God will forsake His people if they sin
"Now the Lord hath forsaken us" because of Israel's disobedience at the time of the Judges (Jud. 6:9,13)
"Because Mannaseh hath done these abominations... I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies" (2 Kings 21:14)
"Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people... because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers and they please themselves" (Is. 2:6)
"I am against the (false) prophets... (therefore) I will even forsake you" (Jer. 23:33)
"If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2)
"This people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the land... and will forsake me... then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them" (Dt. 31:16,17).

Knowing all this, He cried out: "*Why* have You forsaken me?". He felt forsaken by God, and Biblically, without a doubt, being forsaken by God means you are a sinner. "*Why* (oh *why*) have You forsaken me?" is surely the Lord Jesus searching His conscience with desperate intensity, finding nothing wrong, and crying to God to show Him where He had failed, why the Father had forsaken Him. It may be that initially He assumed He had sinned (Ps. 69:5), going through the self-doubt which David went through at the time of Absalom's rebellion (Ps. 3:2). As David had felt then that God had cast him off, even though "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail", so the Lord felt (Ps. 89:33,38). But then with an unsurpassedly rigorous self-examination, He came to know that He really hadn't. This means that once over the crisis, our Lord died with a purity of conscience known by no other being, with a profound sense of His own totality of righteousness. Again, this enables us to better enter into the intensity of "*It* is finished".

The Lord understood His death as drinking a cup from God. But that cup was, in Old Testament language, the cup of God’s wrath against a disobedient people. The Lord knew that His death was a bearing of their

judgment- which is not to say, of course, that the Lord's murderers, as any sinners, have to also answer for their sins. He so wished to gather the "chicks" of Jerusalem under His wings, but they would not, and thus the house of the temple would be left desolate. The image seems to be of a farmyard hen in a fire, gathering the chicks under wings as the house burnt down, so that afterwards, beneath her charred and destroyed body, her brood would be found alive. The Lord so wished the burnt offering of the cross to result in the salvation of the Israel of His day- but they would not. This was His level of love for those who baited Him, irritated Him, dogged His every step.

Christ knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us… wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated *as if* He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel. It seems that even our Lord did not appreciate the extent to which He would be identified with sinful Israel, the extent to which He would have our sins imputed to Him, the weight of them, the degree to which He would be made sin for us, although knowing no sin (2 Cor. 5:21). And if He found this hard to come to terms with, no wonder we do too. The fact that the judgment for sin is sometimes equated with the sin itself was doubtless appreciated by the Lord (cp. 2 Kings 15:23); but the extent of this principle was what seemed to have been unappreciated by Him until the cross. Likewise, He would have meditated upon the way righteous men had taken upon themselves the sins of their people. Thus Jeremiah speaks as if he has committed Israel's sins; Ezra rends his clothes and plucks off his hair, as if *he* has married out of the Faith (Ezra 9:4 cp. Neh. 13:25; the Lord received the same sinner's treatment, Is. 50:6). Moses' prayer for God to relent and let him enter the land was only rejected for the sake of his association with Israel's sins (Dt. 3:26). But the *extent* to which the Lord would bear our sins was perhaps unforeseen by Him. And indeed, through His sin- bearing and sin-feeling, He enabled God Himself to know something of it too, as a Father learns and feels through a son. Thus God is likened to a man who goes away into a far country (Mt. 21:33)- the very words used by the Lord to describe how the sinner goes into a far country in his departure from the Father (Lk. 15:13). "My servant" was both Israel and the Lord Jesus; He was their representative in His sufferings. Which may well explain why in an exhibition of prisoners art from the Auschwitz death camp, there were so many crucifixes and 'stages of the cross' drawn by Jews, even in the

wood of the huts, etched with their finger nails. They saw then, and will see again, the extent to which Jesus of Nazareth, through His cross, identifies with the suffering servant of Israel. Isaiah brings this point out Biblically- early in his prophecy he speaks of how “my servant" Israel will be wounded, bruised, tormented with “fresh stripes" (Is. 1:6 RVmg)- exactly the language Isaiah later uses about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus in His death.

Christ died to save Israel rather than everyone in the Gentile world (Is. 49:5; 53:8; Gal. 4:4,5), He was “a servant to the circumcised" (Rom. 15:8), " the consolation *of Israel*”, unto *them* was born a saviour (Lk. 2:11,25), and therefore He had to be exactly representative of them. For this reason it was theologically necessary for Jesus to be Jewish in order to achieve the work He did. We are only saved by reason of becoming in Christ and therefore part of the Israel of God (Gal. 3:27-29). The Jewish basis of salvation is absolutely fundamental to a correct understanding of the Gospel.

Consider the following evidence that fundamentally, Christ died to save Israel:
"For unto us (Israel) a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6)
"The Lord formed me in the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him" (Is. 49:5)
"For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Is. 53:8)
“God sent forth his son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law" (Gal. 4:4,5)
The good news of Christ’s birth was for “all the people" of Israel, primarily (Lk. 2:10 RV).
The Lord laid down His life “for the sheep" of Israel (Jn. 10:15,16).

Both Peter and Paul appealed to the Jews to repent because it was for them that Christ had died: "Ye are the children...of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying.... And in thy seed shall all the kindreds (tribes) of the earth (land) be blessed. Unto you first (i.e. most importantly) God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities... God raised unto Israel a Saviour… men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham... to you is the word of this salvation sent... we declare unto you glad tidings (the Gospel), how that the promise (of salvation in Christ) which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children" (Acts 3:25,26; 13:23,26,32,33).

"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision (Rom. 15:17) has reference to Isaiah’s Servant prophecies of the crucifixion. But it is also, as so often in Paul, a reference to the Lord’s words; in this case,

Mt. 20.26-28: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many". The 'becoming a servant' refers to His death; and He became a servant, Paul says, to the Jews above all.

Because of all this, the sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross. But punishment with rod and stripes was to be given if Messiah sinned (2 Sam. 7:14). Yet Christ received this punishment; because God counted Him as if He were a sinner. His sharing in our condemnation was no harmless piece of theology. He really did feel, deep inside Him, that He was a sinner, forsaken by God. Instead of lifting up His face to Heaven, with the freedom of sinlessness, He fell on His face before the Father in Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), bearing the guilt of human sin. There are times when we may feel that the righteousness of Christ makes Him somehow inaccessible to us. Even among contemporary brethren and sisters, there are some who I feel somehow distanced from, simply because I know they are far more righteous than I. And I know that there are many of us who feel the same. We feel that they just don't know what it feels like to be spiritually down and out, to feel and deeply know the dirt of our own nature. And if we have this problem with each other, we will surely have it with the Lord Jesus too. For this reason many of us lack the dynamic, close personal relationship with Christ which we should have.

And yet here on the cross, we see our Lord with all the panic of the sinner who knows He is facing judgment and death, feeling every bit, right throughout His very being, the alienation from God which sin brings. He knew the agony of separation from God because of sin. He was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with; no wonder we do, on a far more abstract level. Is. 63:2,3 explains how in the process of obtaining salvation, the Lord's clothing would be made red. Red clothes in Isaiah suggest sinfulness that needs cleansing (Is. 1:18). He was completely identified with us, to the point of feeling a sinner even although He never sinned. Perhaps this was why Pilate marvelled so greatly at Christ's silence when under false accusation (Mk. 15:5); Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, and he had seen many innocent men being condemned in that court situation. Innocent men usually protest their innocence, desperately. But this innocent man

didn't. Perhaps the paradox is explained by the fact that Jesus felt so closely identified with sinful, guilty humanity that He didn't do the natural thing, which would've been to loudly proclaim His own innocence.

The Greek word translated "forsaken" occurs also in Acts 2:27, where Peter quotes from Psalm 16 concerning how Christ was always aware of His own righteousness, and therefore confidently knew that God would not "*leave* (forsake) his soul in hell". In Ps. 22:1, our Lord was doubting His previous thoughts, as prophesied in Ps. 16:10. He now feared that God had forsaken Him, when previously He had been full of confidence that God would not do so, on account of His perfect character. Because Christ felt such a sinner deep within Him, He even doubted if He really was the Messiah. This is how deeply, how deeply, our Lord was our representative, this is how thoroughly He bare our own sins in His own body on the tree, this is how deeply He came to know us, to be able to exactly empathize with us in our spiritual weakness; this was how He became able to have a fellow feeling with those who are out of the way, who have lost the faith, "for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2). The way the Lord felt as a sinner without being one is possibly reflected in the way He framed the parable of the prodigal son. For like it or not, the prodigal is portrayed in terms which are elsewhere applicable to Jesus- the beloved son of the Father, given the Father's wealth as His inheritance, He who was rich becoming poor, going into the Gentile world, accused of companying with prostitutes, bitterly rejected by the elder brother [cp. the Pharisees], accused of wasting wealth [by Judas], received with joy by the Father. Of course, the Lord Jesus did not sin. But why is the sinner framed in the story in the very terms which are applicable to the sinless Son of God? Surely the Lord did this to reflect the degree to which He felt His identity with sinners, although He never sinned.

The greatest fear within a righteous man is that of sinning. There are many Messianic Psalms in which David, in the spirit of Christ, speaks of His fear of being forsaken by God:
"Leave me not, neither forsake me, *O God of my* salvation" (Ps. 27:9; cp. "*My God*, Why hast thou forsaken me")
"Forsake me not, O Lord: *O my God* be not far from me" (Ps. 38:21)
"Hide not they face from thy servant... hear me speedily" (Ps. 69:17)- implying that a lack of response to prayer (as He experienced on the cross) was perceived by the Lord as rejection.
"Forsake me not... *O God*, forsake me not" (Ps. 71:9,18)
"I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not" (Ps. 119:8)
"Forsake not the works of thine own hands" (Ps. 138:8).

This points forward to how our Lord had this lifelong fear of being forsaken by God as a result of sin. Under the extreme pressure of the cross, amidst His constant self-examination, it is understandable that Christ's greatest fear, perhaps almost His paranoia, appeared to become realized. The crowd had been trying to brainwash our Lord with the idea that He had sinned; and because of His humanity and sensitivity of His personality, the Lord Jesus was perhaps subconsciously influenced by all this. He was no hard man, insensitive to the jeers of men. Remember how He was laughed *to scorn* both on the cross and in the home of Jairus, and how He did not hide His face from the *shame* which He was made to feel by men (Mt. 9:24; Ps. 22:7; Is. 50:6). Job's sufferings were another type of Christ's, and his sufferings (cp. Christ's experience on the cross) was the thing which He had greatly feared all his life (Job 3:25). The thing which Christ greatly feared, according to the Psalms, was being forsaken by God. And true enough to the Job type, this came upon Him. Because Christ truly felt a sinner, He felt forsaken by God. This is to me the explanation of one of Scripture's most enigmatic verses: "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but my servant? Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Is. 42:18,19). The Lord Jesus, as the servant, was to share the blindness and deafness of an obdurate Israel. He identified with us even in our sinfulness; and yet He was the blind who was perfect; and this is the very thing that empowers the spiritually blind to see. When God made His soul sin on the cross [AV "offering for sin" is not in the Hebrew text- it's an interpretation], *then* He saw [Heb. to perceive / discern] His seed (Is. 53:10). This all seems to mean that it was through this feeling as a sinner deep within His very soul, that the Lord Jesus came to 'see', to closely identify with, to perceive truly, us His sinful seed / children. And He did this right at the very end of His hours of suffering, as if this was the climax of His sufferings- they led Him to a full and total identity with sinful men and women. And once He reached that point, He died. The total identity of the Lord with our sinfulness is brought out in passages like Rom. 8:3, describing Jesus as being "in the likeness of sinful flesh" when He was made a sin offering; and 1 Pet. 2:24, which speaks of how He "his own self…in his own body" bore our sins "upon the tree". Note that it was at the time of His death that He was especially like this. I believe that these passages speak more of the Lord's moral association with sinners, which reached a climax in His death, than they do of His 'nature'. The Greek words *charis* [grace] and *choris* [apart] differ by one very small squiggle. This is why there's an alternative reading of Heb. 2:9: "So that apart from God [*choris theou*] he [Jesus] tasted death for us" (2). This would then be a clear reference to the way that the Lord Jesus felt apart from God at His very end. Not that He was, but if He felt like that, then this was in practice the experience which He had. Thus even when we feel apart from God- the Lord Jesus knows even that feeling.

In every other recorded prayer of His in the Gospels, the Lord addressed the Almighty as “Father"; but now He uses the more distant “My God", reflecting the separation He felt. But therefore His mind flew to Ps. 22:1, and He quoted those words: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me". But the fact His mind went to the Scriptures like that was His salvation. There is reason to think that in His last few minutes, the Lord quoted the whole of Ps. 22 out loud. Thus He asked for a drink " that the Scripture might be fulfilled”, or finished, and then His words "It is finished" followed- which are actually an exact quote from the Septuagint of the last verse of Ps. 22. Psalms 22 and 69 can be clearly divided into two halves; the first half speaks of the confused thoughts of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross, but then there is a sudden rally, and His thoughts become clearly more confident and positive, centred around the certainty of our future salvation. As Christ quoted or at least thought through Psalm 22, He came to the glorious conclusion: Of course this is how Messiah must feel, He *must* feel forsaken, as Ps. 22 prophesied, but He would go on to save God's people! Just because Messiah would *feel* forsaken didn't mean that He Himself had sinned! We can almost sense the wave of reassurance that swept over our Lord, that deep knowledge of His own good conscience. And therefore how desperate He was, despite that ravaging thirst, to utter to the world that cry, "It is finished"; to show to us all that He had achieved God's work, that He *had* perfectly manifested the Father, and that thereby He really had achieved our redemption.

Notes

(1) This chronology is my preferred one. Yet it presents the problem (for some) of reading "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt. 12:40) as an idiom rather than a literal time period. This problem is well handled in H.A.Whittaker, 'Three days and three nights', in *Studies in the Gospels*.

(2) A reading justified at length in Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977) pp. 87-97.

27:47 *And some of them standing there, when they heard it, said: This man calls Elijah*- They were confusing "Eliyahu" with "Eloi, Eloi". With teeth loose or missing, throat parched from the fever induced by the iron nails in the blood stream, the difficulty of speaking because of being suspended by the arms... this confusion isn't surprising.

27:48 *And immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink*- John defines the reed as a hyssop, which is not more than 50 cm. long. We conclude that the Lord was not lifted up that high above the earth. His knees would have been at head height for those standing by the cross.

27:49 *And the rest said: Let him be. Let us see whether Elijah comes to save him*- They grudged even temporal relief for the Lord, because they were intent on testing whether He was indeed a true prophet. They felt justified in subjecting Him to the worst torture and indignity because they thought they were testing a false prophet.

27:50 *And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit*- "Again"- after "It is finished". The Diaglott of Mt. 27:50 suggests that this cry *was* the giving up of the spirit: "Then Jesus crying out again with a loud voice, expired". For the huge significance of this, see on Lk. 23:46. The Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him (Jn. 10:18); He consciously controlled the giving out of His last breath.

27:51 *And the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth quaked*- The way into the most holy was now open to all, the veil torn from top to bottom because this was done by God. The High Priest's garments had been torn by him, and now the veil itself was open. Judaism was effectively over. Direct fellowship with God was now made possible through the Lord's death. We note by contrast how the same word is used to describe how the Lord's garment was *not* rent (Jn. 19:24). .

And the rocks were split- "Rocks" translates *petra*, the Lord's special name for Peter. According to the reconstruction of events offered earlier, Peter was present at the crucifixion, a witness to the Lord's sufferings (1 Pet. 5:1), and what he saw there was the basis of his conversion. Perhaps we are therefore intended to imagine the rending of Peter's heart as part of his conversion process; and his path is to be ours, if we allow the cross the same power in our hearts.

Job said that if he justifies himself, he will be condemned out of his own mouth (Job 9:20- he understood the idea of self-condemnation and judgment now). Isaiah also foresaw this, when he besought men (in the present tense): "Enter *into the rock*, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty", and then goes on to say that in the day of God's final judgment, "[the rejected] shall go *into* the holes of *the rock*... for *fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty* when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Is. 2:10,11,19-21). We must find a true, self-condemning humility now, unless it will be forced upon us at the judgment. The LXX of Is. 2:19 speaks of a rending of the rocks, exactly the same phrase as occurs in Mt. 27:51 about the crucifixion. Rending of rocks is common judgment day language (Nah. 1:5,6; Zech. 14:4), and consider too how this happened in the theophany of 1 Kings 19:11,12, in which the still small voice would be comparable to the message of the cross.

27:52 *And the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised*- Not in order to let the bodies climb out, for

they were already decayed; but rather as a visual witness to the fact the Lord had conquered death. Likewise at His own resurrection, the Angelic rolling away of the stone was not simply so that the Lord could walk out into the open air, as if He was otherwise trapped behind the rock. He could pass through walls at ease. Rather was it again a visual witness to men.

27:53 *And coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection*- The graves were open for three days, and the bodies only came out of them when the Lord rose from the dead. The message was that His resurrection meant the resurrection of others, if we identify with Him. This latter point suggests to me that these people were likely known followers of the Lord who had died during His ministry and would've been well known to those who saw them.

They entered into the holy city- That sinful city is called “the holy city", even though this will only be Jerusalem's title in the Kingdom age, after her repentance (Is. 1:26). What imputation of righteousness! Again, we see how the record *breathes* the spirit of grace. The fact those mocking Jews died in their beds, that judgment didn't immediately come, that the repentant thief was saved and not made to apologize, that Joseph the secret doubter who voted for the Son of God's crucifixion should be spoken of so highly... there are so many examples of God's pure grace to man.

And appeared to many- The idea of the Greek is not a mere appearance but an explanation or giving of information. These persons were therefore actually preaching something, which supports my suggestion above that they were believers in Jesus.

27:54 *Now the centurion and those that were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that happened*- There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross.

The point has been made that the sight of the crucifixion process divided people into the only two categories which exist in God's sight:
- The repentant thief and the bitter one
- The soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed
- The Sanhedrin members who believed and those who wouldn't
- The women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought
- The people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

This is why recollection of the Lord's agony is to be associated with serious self-examination and humbled, zealous response (1 Cor. 11:28,29). And this is where our study must lead us.

Were terrified, saying- Not just the Centurion but the soldiers with him all made the confession that "This was the Son of God". This is the confessional formula used in the Gospels and Acts. They feared because it was exactly that battalion of soldiers who had just hours before so cruelly abused and mocked the Lord. They came very quickly from that extreme of hating Him to a public confession of faith in Him at the foot of His cross. This is the power of the cross in convicting men. I suggest that psychologically, they could only have made this step of faith because they believed that somehow He would forgive them. They perceived a connection between His death there, and the forgiveness of the greatest human sin, the sin of the cosmos, the worst sin ever committed in the infinity of time and space- to abuse and crucify God's Son. Even that could be forgiven. If those soldiers did not have that conviction, then it seems to me that they simply would have cursed their luck and lived the rest of their days with a "certain fearful looking for of judgment".

Truly this was the Son of God- He said it twice: "This was a righteous man (Lk.), truly this man was the son of God" (Mk.). And he might well have added in his own thoughts: “And I’ve crucified him".

27:55 *And many women were there watching from afar*- There is great emphasis on people "beholding" (Mt. 27:36,54; Lk. 23:35,47-49). He drew the eyes of all men unto Him (Jn. 12:32). There was (and is) a magnetism about the cross. Lk. 23:48 says that there were people 'coming together to that sight'. This might imply that the crowd which was milling around came clustering around the cross once the Lord uttered His final cries and so evidently died. The women also beheld His dead corpse from afar. This seems to be encouraging us to imagine the picture of the Lord just at that point; the dead body on the cross, the victory achieved. It was only at this stage that the curse of Dt. 21 came into effect: "Cursed (Heb. a curse; the Hebrew is *always* translated this way) is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Dt. 21:22,23). These words have been misunderstood as meaning that the Lord as a living being was under one of the Law's curses of condemnation. This cannot be. It must be remembered that crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish method. The Deuteronomy passage was not written with reference to crucifixion, but rather to the custom of displaying the already dead body of a sinner on a pole as a witness and warning (cp. the display of Saul's body). Sin brought the curse; and so every sinful person who died for their sin was bearing the curse of God. They were to be buried quickly as a sign of God taking no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The Lord died the death of a sinner; He bore our sins, and therefore our curse (Gal. 3:13,14). Every

condemned sinner whose body had been displayed had been a type of the sinless Son of God. He was exhibited there for one or two hours (until Joseph got the permission to take the body), totally, totally united with sinful man. And then, because God had no pleasure in this condemnation of sin, the body was taken and buried.

Luke adds that people smote their breasts and 'returned', the same word used about repentance. Smiting the breast connects with the sinner smiting his breast in repentance (Mt. 11:17 RVmg.). The thoughts of many hearts are revealed by meditation on the cross (Lk. 2:35). It leads us to repentance. The prophecy that the Jews would look on His they pierced and mourn in repentance may have had an incipient fulfilment at the crucifixion.

John notes that all the 'beholding' of the crucified Christ was a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy about Israel beholding the one whom they had pierced. Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of

Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

Those who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him- The women who stood afar off and watched in helplessness and hopelessness and lack of comprehension *also followed* the Lord and ministered to Him in the Galilee days. Their standing there like that was still reckoned to them as active following and ministry to Him. They also serve, who merely stand and wait.

27:56 *Among whom were Mary Magdalene*- Mary Magdalene was perhaps named after the town of Magdala. But named Magdalene may mean the Lord gave her that Name just as He gave names to His other disciples. The name derives from the Hebrew *migdol*, 'tower'. So the repeated description of her as the Magdalene could be implying: Mary the tower-Magdalene. Just as the shaky Simon was described as 'the rock', Simon-the-rock, so the shady Mary was surnamed 'Mary-the-tower'. It was common for Jewish rabbis to give their followers names, and it seems the Lord did this too- but the names He gave reflected the potential which He saw in His men and women. And the name He gives us likewise is a reflection of the potential we can live up to. Mary Magdalene is the most frequently named person in the passion narratives. Clearly the Gospel writers, under inspiration, perceived her as the central figure amongst those who were witnesses of it all. In doing so they turned on its head the prevailing idea that the witness of a woman was worthless. They saw her as the main witness. The Gospel writers clearly see Mary Magdalene as of prime importance amongst the women who followed the Lord. Luke twice places her first in his lists of the ministering women (Lk. 8:2; 24:10). Matthew likewise focuses on how she was at Calvary, at the burial and at the empty tomb (Mt. 27:56, 61; 28:1,9). She clearly captured the attention of the gospel writers.

And Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee- The Torah required "two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn't. The fact it doesn't, and therefore accepted women as witnesses, was actually quite a radical thing. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

	Cross	**Burial**	**Resurrection**
Matthew	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"

	Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee		
Mark	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome
Luke			Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

Jn. 19:25 speaks of "His mother's sister". It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus' mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman's name becomes clear; she would have been John's own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject his mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus, the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions…must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the

bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her anointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James…and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James…had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time "Mary the mother of James" rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God's confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

27:57 *And when evening had come, there came a rich man*- The Greek term is found elsewhere in the Lord's parables of the rich fool and of the rich man who refused to believe the testimony of Moses and the prophets about Messiah's resurrection (Lk. 12:16; 16:19). Perhaps Joseph had reflected upon those teachings and vowed not to be like those rich men, but rather to give up his wealth.

From Arimathaea, named Joseph- Perhaps Old Testament 'Ramah', birthplace and home of Samuel.

Who also was a disciple of Jesus- He was 'also' a disciple, in God's eyes, in the same category as the women disciples who were so public about their discipleship (:56). Whilst secret discipleship is not the Lord's intention, and He will arrange circumstances so that we 'come out' publicly, it is not for us to say that He doesn't count secret disciples as also His disciples, just as He did Joseph.

27:58 *This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded it to be given him*- The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection.

For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

The text records that the Jews desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience; indeed, "many" of the elders actually believed in Jesus (Jn. 12:42). It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which " all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre".

They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

John gives the additional detail about the concern that Jesus might not be fully dead, and the piercing of His side. It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. " He that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe" (Jn. 19:35). Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John’s insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord’s blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

Josephus records that victims usually lingered for two days or so before death. The Lord died so quickly. And the legs were broken so that the victims would die quickly (not, as has sometimes been supposed, to stop them running away). These things are harmonized by realizing that there was a support on which the victim could seek temporal relief in order to keep himself alive. Werner Keller explains: "There was often a small support attached called a "sedile" (seat). If the victim hanging there eased his misery from time to time by supporting himself on this, the blood returned to the upper half of his body... when the torture of the crucified man was finally to be brought to an end, the "crucifragrum" was proceeded with: his legs were broken. That meant that he could no longer ease his weight in the footrests and heart failure quickly followed" (Werner Keller *The Bible As History* (New York: Bantam Books, 1983 ed.) p. 356). It seems to me that in keeping with His refusal of the pain killer, His not requesting a drink until the very end, His willing giving of His life... that the Lord didn't press down on the seat, so that effectively He tortured Himself to death. If the victim did not press down on the sedile, the dead weight of the body would cause the intercostal muscles that facilitate inhaling to become too weakened to function. The lungs, unable to empty, would become full of carbon dioxide and death would result from asphyxia. The fact the Lord was making the effort to talk to people and yet, it seems, not pressing down on the sedile… is simply an essay in His self control, in His love, to bother to talk to others… which should inspire us to rise out of our introspection and make the effort likewise to connect with others. Seneca (*Dialogue 3*) writes: "Is it worth to weigh down on one's own wound and hand impaled on a gibbet to postpone something which is... the end of punishment [i.e. death]?" (Quoted in Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion In The Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977)). In practice, the victim was only prolonging his own agony by pressing down on the rest. If the Lord didn't do this, He must have been extremely faint. Keller also comments: "In the case of a person suspended by his two hands the blood sinks very quickly into the lower half of the body. After six to twelve minutes blood pressure has dropped by 50% and the pulse rate has doubled". The Lord must have felt His every heartbeat, and therefore been able to sense when He was approaching death (see 38). Yet amidst the faintness, the knowledge that His heart was about to give out, the Lord remained, I am convinced, completely intellectually consciousness. Deep within Him, that perfect mind was centred on the Father and His word. Several Psalms take on a literal reference to the Lord's final agony: "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me... my flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" (38:10; 73:26).

The physical sufferings of the cross were an especial cause of spiritual

temptation to the Lord; just as physical pain, illness, weakness etc. are specific causes of our temptations to sin. Heb. 2:9 defines the Lord's 'sufferings' as specifically "the suffering of death", the sufferings associated with His time of dying. Heb. 2:18 RVmg. then goes on to say: "For having been himself tempted in that wherein he suffered". The sufferings of death were therefore an especial source of temptation for Him. Truly did He learn obedience to the Father specifically through the process of His death (Heb. 5:8). Let's seek to remember this when we or those close to us face physical weakness, illness and pain of whatever sort.

27:59 *And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth*- Luke's record that Joseph himself took the body down invites us to imagine him using a ladder, perhaps that used to place the title. However, Acts 13:29 suggests that the Roman soldiers on behalf of Jewish people (i.e. Joseph) took the body down; Pilate "commanded the body to be delivered", implying he gave a command to underlings. So in what sense did *Joseph* take the body down and wrap it? Are we to imagine him humbling himself before the crowd to assist those soldiers in the physical act of taking the nails out and lowering the body down? Or it could be that he attracted so much attention to himself and had to humble himself so much to ask the soldiers to do it, that it was effectively as if he did it. But there is no reason to think that he himself didn't walk out in that no man's land between the crowd and the cross and humble himself to take it down, hearing the gasp from the crowd as he touched the blood and dead body which would make him unclean for the feast. His act was a tremendous mental sacrifice as well as a social and physical one. He is described as "honourable", literally 'well-formed / bodied', as if to emphasis his deportment befitting a leader of men. But he humbled himself before that stake. "He took it down" may imply that the stake was left standing. Or was it laid backwards and lowered down horizontal, with Joseph's anxious hands guiding it down? His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The obsession with cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did.

27:60 *And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a great stone as the door of the tomb, and departed*- This apparently needless detail is added because Matthew's camera is as it were focused on the closed tomb, with Joseph now walking away from it.

27:61 *And Mary Magdalene was there*- They didn't stay there long, but

Matthew's camera is focused on Joseph, sealing the tomb and walking away from it, but in the background the camera picks up (blurred and out of focus, as it were) the women sitting there.

And the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb- The crucifixion record describes Mary the mother of Jesus as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mk. 15:40 cp. Mt. 13:55)- not Mary the mother of Jesus. It's as if the record itself seeks to show that separation between mother and Son which occurred there. Both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James- i.e. the mother of Jesus too (Mk. 16:1 = Mk. 15:40 = Mt. 13:55) came to the sepulchre, but Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene first (Mk. 15:9), and not His own dear mother. Mt. 27:61 almost cruelly rubs the point in: "There was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre", but the Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene first. Indeed, there is no record that He ever appeared to His mother. This would presumably have been to help her in realizing that she must relate to Him as her Lord and Saviour now, like any other woman had to, and not as a woman with special maternal privileges in her relationship with her now Almighty Son. It must have so pained the Lord to do this- to not appear to his dear mother first. But as He oftentimes acts with us, so He did with her- doing something which even in Divine nature must have been so painful for Him, in order to help her in her growth. We read in Mk. 15:40 that "Mary the mother of James the little one and of Joses" stood by the cross (RVmg.). I take this Mary to be Mary the mother of Jesus, for Mt. 13:55 records that James and Joses were brothers of Jesus and thus children of Mary. Remember that Mark is writing under inspiration a transcript of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles, as they recounted the message of Jesus time and again. Could it not be that in the preaching of that Gospel, when it came to the cross, James asked to be surnamed "the little one", remembering his earlier rejection of Jesus his brother? Now it is not at all surprising that Saul of Tarsus too decides to call himself 'the little one', through sustained meditation upon the cross.

27:62 *Now the next day, which is the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together before Pilate*- Matthew wants to present the day of the Lord's death as being the day upon which the Passover lambs were killed. "Came together" again shows how the Lord's cross both gathered together and divided people, as it does, or is intended to do, today.

27:63 *Saying: Sir, we remember that that deceiver said when he was still alive, After three days I will rise again*- They were capable of accurate quoting the Lord's words, which means their frequent misquotations of His words were the more culpable and consciously done.

27:64 *Therefore, command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him away and say to the people, He is risen from the dead; and so the last error will be worse than the first*- The Greek for "error" is the same basic word as that translated "deceiver" with reference to the Lord (:63). The first deception would therefore refer to the Lord's [supposedly deceptive] claim that He was Son of God and would therefore rise from the dead; the last error / deception would then be the distribution of the idea that He had indeed risen from the dead. And of course it was exactly this which happened; yet again, we see how the careful, cunning plans of the Jews concerning the Lord's destruction never really worked out. They ended up crucifying Him at Passover, exactly when they did *not* want to do it; their plan with Judas backfired when he recanted and killed himself; their attempt to bribe the soldiers became an openly known secret. Quite clearly, the Lord's death was arranged by the Father and was the Lord's own will, and was in no way merely the result of the clever plots of wicked men.
But there is another possibility regarding the first and last errors. It could be a reference to Mary and Jesus claiming that He was the result of a virgin birth- this, as far as the Jews were concerned, was the "first deception".

27:65 *Pilate said to them: You have a guard. Go make it as secure as you can*- The Jews had access to detachments of Roman soldiers with which they policed and protected the temple. These would have been the same soldiers who arrested, guarded and mocked the Lord, and perhaps were also present at the crucifixion. Surely many of them came to believe.

27:66 *So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard*- Absolutely all was done to make the tomb tamper proof, making the Lord's resurrection all the more powerful.

CHAPTER 28

28:1 *Now after the Sabbath*- AV "In the end of the Sabbath". This could be another hint that the ordinances of Judaism had now come to an end with the Lord's death; the Sabbath was now "past" (Mk. 16:1).

Toward the dawn of the first day of the week- AV "as it began to dawn toward the first day". The language hints very much at a new creation beginning. And yet it began in darkness, not only literally, but also in the darkness of the disciples' disappointment, misunderstanding and weak faith. From all this, great light was to arise.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went- The Lord's mother. Inevitably there would have been jealousy between the two Marys, not least because Mary Magdalene apparently saw the Lord first and appears to have been closer to Him than His own other. This is perhaps reflected in the other records focusing on Mary Magdalene going to the tomb as if she went alone.

To see the tomb- The same word has just been used about the same women 'beholding' the crucified Christ (27:55). The impression presented [as so often] is that the Lord's followers fiercely and deeply loved Him, but with such little understanding. And perhaps that is the abiding impression we are left with of the body of Christ, despite all our strife over 'understanding correctly'.

28:2 *And there was a great earthquake, for an Angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came*- Two earthquakes happened, three days apart (27:54). A "great earthquake" is associated with the Lord's return (24:7; Rev. 6:12; 11:19; 16:18). And there is plenty of other language used about the second coming which also occurs here in the record of the Lord's resurrection. A descent from Heaven, an Angel [Angels will come with the Lord at His second coming], lightning, glistering white clothing, fear and great joy- this is all the language of the second coming and the resurrection from the dead. The connection is clearly because the Lord's resurrection is to be understood as the basis for the resurrection of all in Him- see on 27:52,53. The women went to the tomb in the immediate aftermath of a great earthquake; or perhaps it happened whilst they were on their way there. Their love of their Lord, purely as love for Him as a person, as they had little firm expectation of a resurrection, is amazing. The earthquake didn't faze them.

And rolled away the stone and sat upon it- The Angel descended and did this before the women arrived; for on the way, they had worried about how they would roll the stone away, but when they got there, they found it done already (Mk. 16:2,4). Women unable to roll away a stone recalls

the scene when Rachel and her girls were unable to roll the stone away from the well until Jacob did it (Gen. 29:3,10). The idea would therefore be that the Lord's tomb was in fact a well of living water which would flow for God's people after and on account of His resurrection; and this idea is elsewhere stated specifically by the Lord in John's Gospel.

28:3 *His appearance was as lightning and his garment white as snow*- This is the language used elsewhere about the Lord Jesus, especially at the transfiguration and later in Revelation. The similarities were intentional. The women were being shown that the Lord's representative Angel [perhaps Gabriel] was visible and active, and this was to encourage them to believe that He Himself was now alive.

Of course Mary was scared. But note the contrast with the soldiers guarding the tomb. They were *so* scared by the sight of the Angel that they lost consciousness (Mt. 28:4). The women saw the same Angel, were scared, but not to the same extent. They looked at His face- for it was presumably they who told Matthew what the Angel's face looked like: "As lightning, and his raiment white as snow". Their love for their Lord, their searching for Him, the very deep, unarticulated, vague hope they had in Him… drove away the worst part of their fear, whereas the unbelieving soldiers simply passed out from fright. Indeed, it appears that Mary was so distracted by the deep grief that only comes from love, that she perhaps didn't even notice the Angel's glory, or at least, didn't pay too much attention to the two Angels sitting where the head and feet of the Lord had been. They ask her why she's crying, and she simply turns away from them, muttering 'Because they've taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've put Him'. That was how deep her grief and distraction was; for that was how deeply she loved Him. Again and again one salutes the decision of the Father, in choosing Mary to be the first one of us to see His risen Son.

28:4 *And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men*- They shook along with the earth, which shook at the earthquake. Their association with the earth is therefore made apparent. The women came to the tomb, therefore, to find the stone moved away, the Angel sitting upon it, and the soldiers laying on the ground like corpses. The women had come expecting to find the dead body of Jesus, slain as He had been by Roman soldiers. Instead they find the situation reversed; the soldiers are lying there dead, as corpses [*nekros*], and an Angel who is clearly representative of Jesus tells them that He has risen from the dead.

28:5 *And the angel said to the women*- AV "Answered and said". The fear of the women was not verbalized, but the Angel responded to it, just as God often responds to our unexpressed fears.

Do not be fearful- The idea is '*You* do not need to be fearful, unlike these soldiers who are paralyzed by their own fears'. Their weakness is still apparent in the record, because :8 says that they left the scene "with fear...".

For I know you seek Jesus, who has been crucified- The women had come to anoint the Lord's dead body, with apparently no expectation that He would indeed rise the third day as He had predicted. And yet the Angel generously counts this to them ('I know / perceive / accept / count it') as if they were actively looking for Jesus. Their obvious error- that they assumed Him to still be dead- is not rebuked because the good news is simply so much greater. The resurrection records are full of such imputed righteousness. Lk. 24:5 enquires why they are 'seeking the living amongst the dead'. They were not seeking the living- they had come to anoint a dead body. Yet they are graciously counted as seeking Jesus as if they were seeking for a living person. John's record has the Lord asking Mary *whom* she is 'seeking', and this is how John's Gospel opens, with the Lord enquiring of His followers *whom* they were seeking (Jn. 1:38; 20:15). This question as to the Lord's identity echoes down to us, for we too can feel a devotion and identity with the idea of 'Jesus' without perceiving that He really is alive and active. The Lord counted righteousness to them, they are commended by the Angels for 'seeking the Lord'- even though that seeking was deep in their subconscious. Yet the record notices that even incipient faith and understanding in those women, and counts it to them. Would that we would be so generous in our perception of others. The weeping, helpless standing afar off at the cross are described as still following the Lord Jesus and ministering to Him, as they did in the happier Galilee days (Mk. 15:41). Their essential spirit was understood and credited to them, even though their actions seemed to belie this. Likewise our essential desires are read as our prayers, even if the words we use seem quite different.

Mk. 16:6 adds: "Jesus of Nazareth", as if emphasizing the Lord's humanity and death as compared to the wonderful reality of His resurrection.

28:6 *He is not here, for he is risen, even as he said*- The idea may be 'Not here in a tomb, in a place for the dead', in the spirit of Lk. 24:5 "Why do you seek the living amongst the dead?".

Come see the place where the Lord lay- There is no hint that the women obeyed. They had arrived at the tomb and had gone in and found the body missing (Lk. 24:3,23), and then the Angel[s] appeared to them. Now the Angels are inviting them to go into the tomb again and behold the place where the Lord's body had lain- perhaps because now there were Angels sitting at the head and feet of where the Lord's body had lain (Jn. 20:12). Along with imputed faith and righteousness, the disobedience

of the disciples is also emphasized by the records. They struggle to believe His clear predictions of resurrection, are disobedient to the various commands to witness about it, disbelieve the women, and still appear depressed and sceptical that it is really Him when He appears to them for the third time in Galilee. Or it could be that they did go and see the place where the Lord lay, and yet found the body missing and were confused (Lk. 24:3,23)- even with an Angel standing there telling them the Lord had risen as He had said!

28:7 *And go quickly and tell his disciples*- The urgency required was partly because the wonder of the good news does itself impart an urgency to our presentation of it. And we need to analyse our own approach to witness and discern whether there is any sense of urgency to it; the record of baptisms in the early church was of immediate baptism, the very moment the person had believed, rather than waiting as many do today until a convenient time and place. But the urgency was also to tell the disciples before they totally lost their faith. The Lord was clearly concerned that they would lose faith entirely; and this explains His change of plans concerning revealing Himself to them in Galilee.

That he has risen from the dead, and that he goes ahead of you into Galilee. There you shall see him- This addresses their obvious although unspoken question: 'Where's the body? When can we see Him?'. The answer was 'As He explained before, you must show your obedience to Him by going into Galilee and there you will see Him'. But this plan, explained by the Lord earlier and now repeated by the Angel, was cut short by the Lord Himself. For right after this, He appears to Mary and the women. Right there, and not in Galilee. And soon afterwards He appears to the eleven in Jerusalem; and when He does finally meet the disciples in Galilee, this was the third appearance He had made to them, the earlier two having been in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14). This change of plan was perhaps partly quite simply from the excitement of love, emotions which are still possible even within Divine nature. But partly it may have been because of the very weak state of the disciples' faith, and the Lord's sense that He must act urgently so that they did not lose faith permanently; see on *Go quickly and tell...*. The idea of the Lord going before them into Galilee is based upon the Lord's teaching in 26:31,32: "I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you into Galilee". The 'going ahead' is also a sheep and shepherd allusion; although the sheep would be scattered, the Lord would go ahead of them into Galilee and like sheep obedient to the shepherd's voice, they would follow Him there. But perhaps the Lord now realized that their faith and obedience was just not enough for them to do that, and so He appeared to them anyway. Indeed, according to John, the disciples appeared to have finally returned to Galilee in order to return to their fishing business, despite having met the risen Lord in Jerusalem. They were very slow to really grasp the reality of

His resurrection. The Gospels are their own account of their preaching, and it's as if they are telling the world how slow they had been to believe and were urging the world to do better than them, and to believe more quickly.

Look, I have told you- This could be in order to encourage their obedience. But see my suggestions above, that the disciples simply failed to have that level of obedience. Angelic unity with the risen Lord Jesus is brought out by a comparison of the words spoken to the women after the resurrection. Mk. 16:7 has the Angels telling the women: "He is going before you to Galilee; they you will see him, as he told you". But Mt. 28:7 has the Angel saying: "He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I [the Angel] have told you". Perhaps what the Angel said was: "… as he told you… Lo, I have told you", thus bringing out the new unity between the risen Christ and the Angel who now appeared as Him and represented Him.

28:8 *And they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy*- In apparent obedience to the command to "quickly" tell the disciples (:7). But again the record is imputing righteousness to them, for Mk. 16:7,8 says that they fled in fear and said nothing to anyone: "Go tell His disciples, and Peter, that He goes ahead of you into Galilee. There shall you see Him, just as He told you. And they went out and ran from the tomb. Trembling and astonishment had come upon them, and they said nothing to anyone. For they were afraid". It was only later that they told the disciples, once their fear subsided and joy began to be their dominant emotion. We recall how the shepherds were told not to fear but to focus upon the joy of the Lord's birth (Lk. 2:10). Fear and joy do not remain coexistent for long, and to their credit, the women's joy became greater than their fear. See on :10 *Fear Not*. But putting meaning into words, what were they fearful about? Surely they now realized that they had so failed to believe the Lord's clear words about His resurrection; and they knew now that since He was alive, they must meet Him and explain. So their fear related to their own sense of unworthiness; and yet it was paradoxically mixed with the "great joy" of knowing His resurrection. And there is reason to understand that those women are typical of all those who are to fulfil the great commission.

The accounts of the Lord's resurrection and the imparting of that good news to others are studded with the idea of speedy response. "Go quickly and tell his disciples… and they departed quickly… and did run to bring his disciples word" (Mt. 28:7,8). The accounts show how Mary "quickly" told the disciples, the women did likewise, the two on the way to Emmaus ran back to town and urgently told the others that the Lord had risen… and then the record climaxes in bidding us take that very same good news of the resurrection to the whole world. But the implication from the context

is that it is to be done with the same spirit of urgency. We are merely continuing in the spirit of those who first spread that good news.

And ran to bring this message to his disciples- Running and sharing God's word are associated to the point that running is almost a metaphor for preaching. Thus Paul writes of his preaching among the Gentiles as 'running' (Gal. 2:2; 1 Cor. 9:26; Phil. 2:16 s.w. cp. Dan. 12:2). The clearest example would be in 2 Thess. 3:1: "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly" (s.w.). The running of the women with the fresh news of Christ's resurrection then becomes the pattern for all Christian preaching; we are continuing to run with the message. And the content of the message, 'the word of / about the Lord', is the word that He has risen. We should recall that this very first obedience to the great preaching commission was not met with success- but rather the words were mocked as madness and disbelieved.

28:9 *And Jesus met them, saying: Greetings!*- Having changed His plan of meeting the women in Galilee, see on :7 He goes ahead of you into Galilee. "Greetings!" is otherwise translated "Joy" or "Rejoice!". The last two times the Lord had heard it, it had been addressed to Him sarcastically by His abusers (26:49; 27:29). But it is the word also used of how the shepherd 'rejoices' on finding the lost sheep (18:13). This perhaps was the sense of the Lord's joy upon meeting them; the whole process of death and resurrection had been in order to seek and find the disciples. And surely the Lord was consciously aware of His prediction of Jn. 16:22: "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice" [s.w. "greetings!"]. But again it was as if He had to get them to rejoice, rather than them doing so on their own initiative; their weakness is so emphasized.

And they came and took hold of his feet and worshipped him- The Lord appeared to them from a slight distance and did not go up to them and initiate physical contact. Rather did He announce Himself and leave them to come to Him. The Lord, straight after His resurrection, repeats verbatim the Angels words to Mary: “Woman, why are you weeping?” (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel’s words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with them especially after His resurrection.

Is "took hold of his feet" to be connected with how Mt. 18:29 describes casting oneself down at another’s feet implying a desperate request for mercy? Or at least, a desperate request (Mk. 5:22; 7:25; Lk. 8:41), as Mary had made herself earlier (Jn. 11:32). Their experience of the death and resurrection of the Lord elicited within them a sense of their unworthiness. Or was it simply because they feared He would disappear, as in Jn. 20:17? The same Greek words for falling down at the feet and worshipping are used about how Cornelius worshipped Peter (Acts 10:25) and how the believers at Philadelphia will be worshipped (Rev. 3:9).

Trinitarians therefore display their Biblical ignorance and paucity of Biblical scholarship by making any claim that the fact Jesus was worshipped by the feet therefore means He was God. That is simply not the case.

28:10 *Then Jesus said to them: Fear not*- See on 28:8 *They departed quickly.* Their fear was wrong, the Angel had urged them not to fear, and yet they still feared.

Go tell My brothers- Mk. 16:7,8 says that initially their fear was so great that they were resolved not to tell anyone anything, i.e. to be disobedient to the commission to tell their brethren the good news. And so the Lord Himself intervenes to urge them to go tell their brethren. Note how the Lord uses the term "My brothers". He was anxious to demonstrate that His resurrected, glorified status did not mean that His human brethren were not His brethren any longer; just as in Jn. 21 He addresses the disciples with a slang word, 'guys' [AV "children", *paidos*], to emphasize His humanity, urging them that His God and Father is theirs (Jn. 20:17,18). We note that it was fear which held them back from obeying the commission to preach, and it is fear which likewise stymies so much of our obedience to the great commission. Fear of consequence, of what others may think of us, of our own unworthiness, fear that we may have misunderstood... all these fears are what stop obedience to the clear, simple command to take the good news directly and personally to others.

"Go tell my brothers" is quoting from the LXX of Ps. 22:23, where in the context of predicting the Lord's death and resurrection, we read that therefore "I will tell of Your name to my brothers". The "I" is clearly Jesus Himself; and yet, as we have elsewhere shown at length, when His people preach in His Name, this is effectively Him preaching. And so the first preacher of the Lord was to be those women. They were to tell His brethren the good news of His resurrection, or, as Ps. 22 puts it, to declare the Name of Yahweh to them. For His resurrection was the declaration and glorification of that Name to the full. Thus Acts 4:10-12 definitely connect the Lord's resurrection and the declaration of the Name. The "things concerning the name of Jesus Christ" would have been those things which concern His death and resurrection. "I will *declare* thy name unto my brethren" (Heb. 2:12) uses the same Greek words as in Mt. 28:10, where Mary is told to go tell her brethren of the resurrection. Rom. 15:8,9 speaks of how it is the Lord Jesus personally who was to fulfil those words through His death, which confirmed the promises of God: "Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* unto the fathers: And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name". And yet these words are applied by the Lord to Mary!

She was to be Him, in the fulfilment of the great commission to tell the world.

The women were told by the risen Lord to "tell My brethren…". In Acts 12:17 the same Greek words are used by Peter: "Go show these things… to the brethren". Peter felt that his deliverance from prison was like the Lord's resurrection, and perhaps consciously he used the Lord's words to Mary Magdalene. Peter then went "to another place" just as the Lord did on saying those words. He saw that his life was a living out of fellowship with the Lord's mortal experiences, every bit as much as our lives are too. The same words occur also in 1 Jn. 1:2,3: "That which we have seen and heard [the teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus] declare we unto you", our brethren. It's as if John is acknowledging that the Lord's commission to Mary was in fact binding upon us all; for we are represented by her.

To go to Galilee and there shall they see Me- The initial plan had been that the women also would need to go to Galilee before meeting the Lord (:7). The Lord changed that plan and appeared to the women immediately; but His plan was still that He would reveal Himself to His male disciples for the first time in Galilee. But He soon changed that plan too, for the other records make it clear that the Lord twice appeared to them in Jerusalem (Jn. 21:14).

Put together the following passages:
- The disciples' return to Galilee after the resurrection was a result of their lack of faith (Jn. 16:31,32)
- But the Lord went before them, as a shepherd goes before His sheep, into Galilee (Mt. 28:7). Even in their weakness of faith, He was still their shepherd, they were still His sheep, and He led them even then.
- The Lord told them to go to Galilee (Mt. 28:10). He accepted their lower level of faith. And He worked through that and led them through it.

The return to Galilee is seen in an even worse light once we reflect on the circumstances surrounding the first calling of the disciples, nearly four years earlier. John's Gospel implies that they were called at Bethany; whereas the other Gospels say they were called whilst fishing at the sea of Galilee. This is usually, and correctly, harmonized by concluding that they were called as John says in Bethany, but they then returned to their fishing in Galilee, and the Lord went there to call them again. So returning to their fishing in Galilee had already been shown to them as being a running away from the call of their Lord. And yet still they did it. And yet John's inspired record is so positive; he speaks as if the disciples were called at Bethany and unwaveringly responded immediately. The point that they actually lost their intensity and returned home is gently omitted from specific mention.

Mary Magdalene is always noted first in the appearance lists in the gospels. It is unusual that the first appearance would involve women as in that culture their role as witnesses would not be well accepted. It is a sign of the veracity of the account, because if an ancient were to create such a story he would never have it start with women. But inspiration disregards this. The Lord so wanted those women to be His leading witnesses. Joachim Jeremias quotes extensively from Jewish sources to show that "a woman had no right to bear witness, because it was concluded from Gen. 18:15 that she was a liar". And Josephus (*Antiquities Of The Jews* 4.219) concurs: "Let not the testimony of women be admitted because of the levity and boldness of their sex". And so it should not surprise us that He chooses today the most unlikely of witnesses, indeed, those who somehow shock and arrest the attention of others.

28:11 *Now while they were going, some of the guard came into the city and told the chief priests all the things that had happened*- The impression is given of two parallel groups of people running back to Jerusalem from the Lord's grave. Both were fearful, both carried the news that the tomb was now empty. The one group went to tell the disciples, the other group went to the chief priests; both groups of messengers were full of an urgent need to tell what had happened. One group were women, the other were men. The suggestion may be that they all carried the same message- Angels had appeared, the body was not there any more, the grave was now open. Something Divine, supernatural and unstoppable by men had happened. See on 28:15 *Did as they were told.*

28:12 *And when they were assembled with the elders*- Again, as with every stage of the whole process, the Jews tried to take comfort in numbers, always meeting together in a vain attempt to spread the responsibility.

And had taken counsel- Matthew especially notes this feature of the Lord's Jewish enemies (12:14; 22:15; 27:1,7- all using the same Greek word).

They gave much money to the soldiers- Circumstances repeat under the hand of Providence, but wicked men never learn. They had given money to Judas but he had made a huge mess of it- in that he had not provided the incontrovertible legal evidence they had hoped for, the Lord's trial had been an obvious farce, and then he had come out on the Lord's side and killed himself. But they still tried to use money to get around the problem. We note that the Jewish leadership did not seek to discredit the soldiers as liars nor did they produce a corpse and claim it was that of Jesus. Their policy had to take account of the simple fact that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb, despite the seal, the soldiers, and every effort to ensure that something like this did in fact *not* happen.

28:13 *Saying: You are to say that His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept*- The desperation of the story is self-apparent; if the soldiers were really asleep then they would not know it was the disciples who had come, nor would they have any explanation as to how the corpse disappeared. Theft, after all, was only one possibility. The story shows every sign of having been thought up too quickly, and then those who wished to believe it were left to justify it for evermore. There was no recorded attempt to arrest or try the disciples for grave breaking or stealing a corpse- a serious offence under Roman law. There should at least have been a semblance of effort to do this if indeed the story were true.

28:14 *And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and keep you out of trouble*- The same word translated "persuade" in 27:20. They had persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and crucify Jesus, and they thought they could deal with Pilate in the same way. Their power over Pilate was assumed; it is doubtful whether they had that much power over a man who was consistently written into history as a conscienceless man- in every matter apart from that of the Lord Jesus.

28:15 *So they took the money and did as they were told*- The Greek *didasko* means 'taught' [as AV], and is an unusual word choice here. Perhaps the idea is that they were taught an official explanation which they memorized and were to trot out each time the issue of the empty tomb was raised. Early Christian converts had to memorize a Gospel record by heart- they were taught [*didasko*] the message of the empty tomb and repeated it. The same word is used just five verses later in :20, where the disciples are commanded to go and teach [*didasko* again] the good news of the empty tomb to the whole world. And the soldiers did the same, spreading the same reality [an empty tomb] but with a different explanation. This connects with the observations made on :11 *While they were going* that there were two groups of people telling the same message- the tomb was empty. But the Gospel preachers were paralleled, as it were, by another group of messengers whose message was identical but freighted with concern that it *not* be believed.

And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day- This is another allusion to the great commission; see on *Did as they were told*. As the story [Gk. *logos*] of the empty tomb was spread by the soldiers "among the Jews", so was the Christian account of the empty tomb spread "among the Jews to this day". The Greek word for "spread" is only elsewhere used about the spreading of the *fame* of Jesus. This is perhaps an allusion to the spreading of Matthew's Gospel record amongst the Jews right up until the day when it was written down- "this day".

28:16 *But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where*

Jesus had told them to go- This continues the theme of the resurrection accounts imputing righteousness to the disciples. The Lord's intention had been that they went into Galilee *before* they saw Him, in order to test their obedience to their Lord's words. But sensing their weakness of faith, the Lord dramatically changed plans and appeared to them whilst still in Jerusalem; see on :7 *He goes ahead of you into Galilee*. And according to John 21, they returned to Galilee to return to their fishing business, rather than out of obedience to the Lord. The disciples "went [away from Jerusalem] to the mountain [in Galilee]"; this may not mean that they actually went where He told them, but rather that they left Jerusalem in that direction. For the whole plan of meeting in Galilee was abandoned; the Lord appeared to them before then, in Jerusalem. And yet the record here speaks so positively of their obedience.

28:17 *And when they saw Him*- His appearance to the disciples in Galilee was the third time He had appeared to them (Jn. 21:14). And even then, they doubted. The disciples were the ones preaching the Gospel records, and truly were they emphasizing their own fallibility and slowness to believe the very message which they urged people to *quickly* believe and accept in instant baptism.

They worshipped him; but some doubted- The idea may not be that some believed but others doubted. It may rather be that they worshipped him and yet doubted at the same time. 'Doubted' translates a word essentially implying to be double minded, wavering between the two positions. The Lord was either dead or alive, and amazingly, they still wondered whether His appearances were tantamount to Him being alive. Even after the resurrection, they *all* saw Him and *all* worshipped Him; but some of them "doubted". You can worship, see the evidence of the Lord with your own eyes, as Israel daily saw the manna, and yet still doubt. Despite having seen the risen Jesus before, they *still* doubted. We really have to reflect on this and be challenged by the weakness of our natures.

28:18 *And Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying: All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth*- Mark and Luke suggest the great commission was given in Jerusalem or on the mount of Olives. So this verse 18 may now be talking about the Lord's next appearance to them in Jerusalem. Or it may be that He gave them the commission twice, and this was the first time He gave it to them. If this latter possibility is correct, then we would have the Lord's triple commission to Peter concerning feeding His sheep given at the same time as the great commission. This commission to Peter was therefore part of the commission to go and make disciples of all the world; with Peter taking special responsibility for the pastoral care of the converts.

All power- The Lord's promised presence with His preachers is capable of being backed up by "all power". The assurance is that insofar as we give

our lives to follow the great commission, all power will be potentially available to us in order to help us achieve that work. This is the force of the "therefore" in :19; because the Lord has all power, we are therefore to go and teach all nations. It is commonly thought that even the Lord Jesus doesn't know the time of his return, only the Father does. During his mortality, the Lord said exactly this (Mk. 13:32)- at the time he was speaking to the disciples, he himself didn't know. But after his resurrection and glorification, the Lord made two statements to the disciples which he surely intended to be connected: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth... it is not for you (the inquisitive eleven standing on Olivet) to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (Mt. 28:18; Acts 1:7,8). But *all* the Father's power has been given to His glorified Son, and this therefore includes knowledge of the "times and seasons" of the second coming. In the exalted Lord "are hid all the riches of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3); it is thereby inconceivable that the Father would still keep back some knowledge from the Son. The point of all this is that when the Lord Jesus said that "of that day and that hour knoweth (present tense) no man, no, not the angels... neither the Son" He was not laying down a general principle for all time. He was speaking of the situation at that time: 'You can't know now, indeed at the moment even I don't know; but these are the signs which will tell the believers when I'll come'. By implication He was saying 'You can't understand them, although I'm giving them to you, but in the future some will understand them, because these signs will accurately pinpoint my return'. This was exactly the spirit of what the Angel told Daniel when he too wished to know when Messiah would come in glory; he was basically told 'It's not for you to understand, but in the last days understanding of these things will be increased among God's people; they will know the time, but you can't'.

The Lord gave a reason for His great preaching commission: "Go ye *therefore*". "*Therefore*". Because of what? Mt. 28:18 provides the answer: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye *therefore*". Because of this, we must spread the Gospel of Christ to the whole planet, because His authority is over the whole earth. He has that power just as much now as He did in the first century; and *therefore* the command to spread the Gospel world-wide still stands today. Indeed, His words here in Mt. 28 have evident reference to Dan. 7:14, where the Son of Man is given authority and power over all *so that* people of all nations, races and languages should serve Him. We must remind ourselves that out of the 5,000 or so languages in the world, only about half of them have the Bible in their own language. Peter preached in and about the name of Jesus- this is emphasized (Acts 2:31,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17,18,30; 5:28,40,41; 10:43). The excellence of knowing Him and His character and the wonder of the exalted Name given on His ascension (Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:12) lead Peter to witness. Because of His exaltation, we confess Jesus as Lord to men, as we later will to God at

judgment (Phil. 2:9). According as we confess Him before men, so our judgment will reflect this. Lifting up Jesus as Lord is to be the basis of giving a witness to every man of the hope that lies within us (1 Pet. 3:15 RSV). The knowledge and experience of His exaltation can only be witnessed to; it can't be kept quiet. 3 Jn. 7 refers to how the great preaching commission was obeyed: "For his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing (material help) from the Gentiles" (Gentile believers). For the excellence of knowing His Name they went forth in witness, and moreover were generous spirited, not taking material help to enable this. The knowledge of the Name of itself should inspire to active service: for the sake of the Lord's Name the Ephesians laboured (Rev. 2:3). The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation. We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all (note the way 1 Tim. 3:16 alludes to the preaching commission as having already been fulfilled the moment it was uttered, so strong is the imperative). There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6).
The great preaching commission is therefore not so much a commandment as an inevitable corollary of the Lord's exaltation to having "all power". We will not be able to sit passively in the knowledge of the universal extent of His authority / power. We will have to spread the knowledge of it to all. There may be some similarity with the way in which the exaltation of Israel / God's people was so that all men would be witnessed to (Dt. 4:6). Jehu was exalted from amongst his brethren as was Christ (2 Kings 9:2 = Dt. 18:18; Ps. 45:7) and taken up into a chamber within a chamber (AVmg), cp. Heaven itself. There Jehu was anointed, made Lord and Christ, and then the people placed their garments underneath him (v. 13) and proclaimed him to the world as King of Israel. This symbolic incident teaches a clear lesson- the exaltation of Jesus should lead us to be witnesses for Him. The wonder and joy of it alone, that one of us, one of our boys, a man like us... should be *so* exalted.

Rev. 14:6 describes the great latter fulfilment of the great preaching commission in terms of an Angel flying in Heaven with the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached to all nations and languages. Surely the implication is that the latter day preachers of the Gospel are walking on earth in league with an Angelic system above them, empowering and enabling them. An Angel may be given a mission to preach somewhere, and success may be arranged by Him in prospect, but it is for us to put the work into practical effect, without which the converts will not be produced, despite the Angels preparatory work, although of course ultimately this is all foreknown by God Himself. Thus we read in Rev. 14:6 of an Angel being sent "having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth (same word as 'land'- the land of Israel),

and to every nation, kindred and tongue and people "(i. e. the whole world as well). However, this actual work of preaching to the Jews and to the world will be done by the saints; thus they will work out in practice what was achieved by the Angel in God's plan. In this context it is worth considering how the great commission as recorded in Mt. 28:18,19 is set in the context of other references in Matthew to world-wide preaching. We are to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations; and yet it is the Angels who will gather the harvest from "the world" (Mt. 13:38), Angels who will "repay" us for our work at the last day (Mt. 16:27), Angels who gather the elect from "the four winds" (Mt. 24:31) and gather [converts from] "all nations" to judgment (Mt. 25:32). The implication surely is that in our preaching work, the Angels are with us and will gather in the converts which we have made.

28:19 *Therefore go*- This evidently connects with the Lord's command in the parable: "*Go ye*" into the highways and "gather together *all*", as many as were found. And this in turn is an extension of an earlier parable, where the net of the Gospel is presented as *gathering* "every kind"- every *genos*, every "kindred / nation / stock / generation", as the word is elsewhere translated (Mt. 28:19; 22:9,10; 13:47). The work of the Gospel described in those earlier parables was now specifically delegated to the Lord's men. Through the work of the Lord's followers over the generations, there would in every nation and generation be some who were gathered in, of as many social classes as one finds walking along a street [highway / byway]. The net of Gospel preaching is filled (*pleroo*), and then pulled to shore for judgment. When the Gospel has been preached in all the world (with response), then the end will come. Elsewhere Paul uses the same word to describe how the Gospel is fulfilled by preaching it (Rom. 15:19; Col. 1:25). To have the Gospel is to have an imperative to preach it.

The victorious truth that "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" is purposefully juxtaposed against the next clause, which seems to contradict it: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Mt. 28:18,19). Through teaching and baptising all nations, the extent of that universal power is made known. But it depends on the freewill obedience of the believers to this commission. The Lord had the Spirit without measure, and yet He "could not" do many miracles in Nazareth because of their unbelief.

And make disciples- The aim of our fulfilling the great commission is above all to "make disciples", to get more followers behind Jesus, more learners of Him, a greater bride for Him. Grammatically in Mt. 28:19-20, *mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb,
and *poreuthentes* ("while going"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"),
and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. In other words, the focus of our work must be upon making disciples for Christ, on

thereby bringing about His glory. All the baptizing and teaching which we do is subsidiary to this aim, and they can therefore never be ends in themselves.

Matthew's record of the great commission draws on earlier themes and passages in his Gospel. The Lord told His men to go out and make disciples of men (Mt. 28:19 RV). In the immediate context, there are many references to the disciples (Mt. 27:64; 28:7,8,13,16). And the term "disciples" occurs more often (73 times) in Matthew than in any of the other Gospels (e.g. only 37 times in Luke). The Lord is telling His men: 'Go out and make men like you- disciples, stumbling 'learners', not experts'. Thus they were to witness from their own experience, to share this with others, to bring others to share the type of relationship which they had with the Lord. In this sense preaching is seen by Paul as a bringing forth of children in our own image. John likewise was "the beloved disciple", the *agapetos*. And yet this is the very term which he uses in his letters to describes his "beloved children" (1 Jn. 2:1; 4:11). He saw them as sharing the same relationship to his Lord as he had. The nature of our relationship with the Lord will be reflected in that of our converts. He tells His men to go to the lost sheep, and yet in that same context He calls them sheep, in the midst of wolves (Mt. 10:6,16). They were sheep sent to rescue sheep- to plead with men and women as men and women, to witness to humanity through their own humanity. Likewise the Lord spoke of how the extraordinary unity of His men would convince others that "thou didst send me" (Jn. 17:23), having just commented how they had surely believed "that thou didst send me" (:8).

The command to 'make disciples' of all men in Matthew is framed in such a way as to make '...baptising them...' a subordinate clause. Baptism is only part of the work of making disciples. In Mt. 28:19-20*mathateusate* ("make disciples") is the main verb, while *poreuthentes* ("while going" or "when [you] go"), *baptizontes* ("baptizing"), and *didaskontes* ("teaching") are subsidiary participles. The focus clearly is upon making disciples- all the other things, the teaching, baptizing, our effort in travelling and preaching, are incidental to this main aim. This is why responsibility to those we may convert only begins at baptism; it's a beginning of a man or woman being fashioned into the image of Christ, not the end. This is why Paul often uses the language of preaching about his pastoral efforts with his brethren [e.g. his desire to 'preach the Gospel' to the believers at Rome to whom he was writing]. He sees himself as preaching Christ to them still, in so doing warning them, "that we may present every man perfect" (Col. 1:28). Thus Paul parallels being a minister of the world-wide preaching of the Gospel, and being a minister of the church (Col. 1:23, 25). He saw his continued work amongst his baptized readership as *fully preaching* the word of God (Col. 1:25 AVmg.). So Paul said in Gal.

4:19 “I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you”. How do we see our responsibility to those to whom we have preached the gospel? We should continue to nurture and feed them well after the time of their baptism. It seems that this is not a general responsibility which falls on the shoulders of all of us. Rather we have a personal responsibility to those we have begotten through the gospel (1Cor. 4:15).

Of all the nations- A reference to Gen. 18:18. The Lord twice told the disciples: "Go ye... go ye" (Mk. 16:15 cp. Mt. 28:19 and contexts). He was encouraging them to do the natural corollary of what they had experienced. The Lord commissioned us to go into all the world and make disciples of all; but He describes this in other terms as being witnesses of Him to the world (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Our witness must fundamentally, therefore, be Christ-centred.

If we say that we are *not* commanded to obey the command to go into all nations, then we must also conclude that we are not commanded to baptize people. And if these words about baptism don't apply to us today, then there is no command of the Lord Jesus to be baptized. The connection between the command to preach and the command to baptize is made clearer by the parallel record: "Go ye therefore, and teach (make disciples of, AVmg.) all nations, baptising them... and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:19,20), i.e. Christ will be with us in our preaching right to the ends of the world. The special closeness of the Lord in preaching work has been widely commented upon by preachers. The commission of Mt. 28:19,20 is alluded to in Acts 14:21 AVmg. concerning the work of Paul and Barnabas, neither of whom were among the twelve: "And when they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had made many disciples...”. This in itself disproves the idea that the great commission was intended only for the twelve.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit- To love God and Christ is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is because of the intense unity of God's Name. Because our brethren and sisters share God's Name, as we do, we must love them as ourselves, who also bear that same Name. And if we love the Father, we must love the Son, who bears His Name, with a similar love. The letters of John state this explicitly. If we love God, we *must* love our brother; and if we love the Father, we *must* love the Son. This is why we must honour the Son as we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); such is the unifying power of God's Name. So the Father, Son and church are inextricably connected. Baptism into the name of Christ is therefore baptism into the Name of the Father, and associates us with the "one Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4). In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings

and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh.

28:20 *Teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you; and I am with you always, even to the end of the age*- The Lord will support the work of the great preaching commission right up to the end of the age- which means that once the commission is completed, and the whole world has indeed been told the good news of the resurrection, then this age shall finish and the Lord shall return. He said the same very clearly in teaching that once the Gospel goes into all the world, then the end shall come. Matthew clearly saw his own Gospel record, the testament to his life's work, as playing a part in bringing about "the end". The further it could be distributed, the faster the end would come. And that challenge remains with us as with no other generation.

There are some definite links between the Greek text of Matthew's record of the commission, and the LXX of the end of Daniel 12:

Matthew	**Daniel 12:13 LXX**
Go ye into all the world (Mt. 28:20)	Go thou thy way
"…then shall the end come" (when the Gospel has been preached to all the world)	till the end
I am with you all the days (28:20 Gk.)	for still there will be days
unto the end of the world	to the end of the world.

These connections suggest that the great commission to preach worldwide will be powerfully fulfilled in the last days- see on 24:14.