

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Notes from a series of sermons

First preached at
Mount Zion Baptist Church, Ashford
by Pastor Christopher Buss
2015-16

THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Contents

<i>1 Mark the Writer: Mark 1.1</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>2 The Ministry of John the Baptist: Mark 1.1-8</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>3 Jesus – In Whom the Father is Well Pleased: Mark 1.9-11</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>4 Jesus – Tempted by Satan: Mark 1.12-13</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>5 Jesus – Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God: Mark 1.14-15</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>6 Jesus – Calling His Disciples: Mark 1.16-20</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>7 Jesus – Casting In and Casting Out: Mark 1.21-34</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>8 Jesus – His Praying, Preaching and Practice: Mark 1.35-45</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>9 Helping One Another God's Way: Mark 2.1-12</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>10 The Call of Christ to the New Way: Mark 2.13-22</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>11 The Lord's Day: Mark 2.23 – 3.6</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>12 Commissioned by Christ: Mark 3.7-19</i>	<i>103</i>

<i>13 Misunderstanding the Mind, Miracles and Ministry of the Lord: Mark 3.20-35</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>14 The Battle for the Heart: Mark 4.1-20</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>15 The Kingdom of God: Mark 4.21-34</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>16 Where is Your Faith? Mark 4.35-41</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>17 What Great Things God has Done for You: Mark 5.1-20</i>	<i>157</i>
<i>18 Faith Exercised in Humility: Mark 5.21-43</i>	<i>165</i>
<i>19 Unbelief in the Presence of Jesus: Mark 6.1-7</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>20 Sent Out by Jesus Christ to Preach the Gospel: Mark 6.7-29</i>	<i>181</i>
<i>21 The Compassion of Jesus: Mark 6.30-44</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>22 The Master is in Complete Control: Mark 6.45-56</i>	<i>203</i>
<i>23 Jesus Deals with the Heart: Mark 7.1-23</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>24 Jesus Nurturing Faith: Mark 7.24-30</i>	<i>225</i>
<i>25 Jesus the Perfect Communicator: Mark 7.31-37</i>	<i>233</i>
<i>26 Assessments Taken in Unbelief – Answered by Jesus: Mark 8.1-21</i>	<i>241</i>

<i>27 Jesus Giving Sight Physically and Spiritually: Mark 8.22-26</i>	<i>251</i>
<i>28 Who is Jesus? Mark 8.27-33</i>	<i>257</i>
<i>29 An Eternal Investment: Mark 8.34-38</i>	<i>265</i>
<i>30 Worship His Majesty: Mark 9.1-8</i>	<i>275</i>
<i>31 No Power Without Faith and Prayer: Mark 9.9-29</i>	<i>281</i>
<i>32 The Saviour Searching the Heart: Mark 9.30-37</i>	<i>289</i>
<i>33 Following Jesus: Mark 9.38-50</i>	<i>295</i>
<i>34 Jesus Cares: Mark 10.1-16</i>	<i>305</i>
<i>35 What Shall I Do to Inherit Eternal Life? Mark 10.17-27</i>	<i>315</i>
<i>36 Leaving All to Follow Jesus: Mark 10.28-34</i>	<i>325</i>
<i>37 The Measure of True Greatness is to Serve: Mark 10.35-45</i>	<i>335</i>
<i>38 The Greatest Question From Our Lord: Mark 10.46-52</i>	<i>341</i>
<i>39 Entering Jerusalem: Mark 11.1-11</i>	<i>349</i>
<i>40 Profession, Practice, and Prayer: Mark 11.12-26</i>	<i>357</i>

<i>41 Questioning and Rejecting God the Son: Mark 11.27-12.9</i>	<i>365</i>
<i>42 God's Cornerstone – Christ Jesus: Mark 12.10-11</i>	<i>375</i>
<i>43 More Questions: Mark 12.13-27</i>	<i>381</i>
<i>44 The First and Second Commandments: Mark 12.28-34</i>	<i>391</i>
<i>45 All That I Have: Mark 12.35-44</i>	<i>399</i>
<i>46 Advice From Christ For Living in the End Times: Mark 13</i>	<i>403</i>
<i>47 An Example of True Christian Love: Mark 14.1-11</i>	<i>411</i>
<i>48 The Lord's Supper: Mark 14.12-26</i>	<i>421</i>
<i>49 False Confidence in the Face of Faithfulness: Mark 14.27-31</i>	<i>427</i>
<i>50 Why Gethsemane? Mark 14.32-42</i>	<i>429</i>
<i>51 The Rejection of Jesus Christ and His Response: Mark 14.43-52</i>	<i>437</i>
<i>52 The Perfect Man, Christ Jesus and the Fallen Man, Simon Peter: Mark 14.53-72</i>	<i>443</i>

<i>53 Envy and Pride Crucifying Christ:</i>	
<i>Mark 15.1-20</i>	<i>451</i>
<i>54 The Power of Christ's Obedient Love:</i>	
<i>Mark 15.21-32</i>	<i>457</i>
<i>55 When God Reminds Us Who Is In Control:</i>	
<i>Mark 15.33-41</i>	<i>467</i>
<i>56 Standing Up For Jesus: Mark 15.42-47</i>	<i>477</i>
<i>57 He is Risen! Mark 16.1-8</i>	<i>487</i>
<i>58 Consequences of Belief and Unbelief:</i>	
<i>Mark 16.9-18</i>	<i>497</i>
<i>59 The Ascension of the Lord – The Presence of the Lord: Mark 16.19-20</i>	<i>507</i>

1. MARK THE WRITER

Mark 1.1

‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.’

We will begin this series of expository preaching by making some observations about the writer, known elsewhere in Scripture as John Mark.

The first record we have relating specifically to Mark is found in *Acts 12.12*.

‘And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.’

The Apostle Peter had been bound in prison by Herod and awaiting death, but at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, many were gathered to pray earnestly for his release. The Lord wonderfully answered prayer and Peter arrived at the door of the house, having escaped.

Here we can notice the connection between Peter and John Mark. This is worth noting inasmuch as the early Church Fathers said Peter oversaw the writing of *Mark’s Gospel*. Certainly the *Gospel*, written in a fast-moving style packed full of information, tends to show Peter’s influence. Peter himself was a man of action who worked flat out for the Gospel of God and was greatly used of God.

Whatever Peter’s influence may have been in working with Mark, Scripture records it as *Mark’s Gospel*. It was therefore Mark who was ultimately inspired of the Holy Spirit to write the account.

The next record we have of John Mark is of his call to the ministry to assist with Barnabas and Paul:

‘And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they

The Gospel of Mark

had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark' Acts 12.25.

It was evident to the Church at Jerusalem that John Mark was called and equipped and ready to be sent out. It appears at the outset his work was to assist practically, to develop later into the fulltime ministry.

'And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister' Acts 13.5.

However, later in the chapter we read that Mark returned to Jerusalem. Some record he was homesick, others that he was wearied in the work, and yet others that he was afraid of the dangers. In any event Mark returned home to Jerusalem, and this action evidently gave Paul great sadness and concern. This is apparent when, later on, Barnabas wanted Mark to resume his ministry with them and Paul refused. The issue was so divisive that Paul and Barnabus separated, and Barnabas took Mark with him to Cyprus.

'And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus' Acts 15.39.

However, it was all overruled for the glory of God for now Barnabas and Paul were ministering in two places. Later there was reconciliation, for Paul sends for John Mark, stating he was profitable.

'Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry' 2 Timothy 4.11.

The Church at Colosse were instructed to receive him.

'Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him)' Colossians 4.10.

Mark the Writer

He was described in the *Letter of Philemon* as a fellow labourer of Paul.

*‘Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers’
Philemon 24.*

It is evident that Peter considered him to be a son in the faith, maybe having been converted under his ministry.

*‘The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you,
saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son’ 1 Peter 5.13.*

Why go into so much detail about the life history of Mark?

The writer was a man who was willing to serve and, as it were, do his apprenticeship in ministry. However, he was a man who did have a crisis in his ministry, which led to a time of failure, but he was restored to ministry under God’s sovereign good pleasure and was proven later to be profitable in the work of the Lord.

So we see how God works through sinners saved by grace and moulds them for His glory. Despite his past failure the Lord chose to use him in the writing one of the four Gospel accounts. The Lord is sovereign in His call and His ways: He equips, restores, and uses in a profitable manner. John Mark, under God, developed in the ministry, was sanctified, and learned to depend only upon God.

John Mark’s testimony teaches us that all the honour and the glory in ministry must be to the Lord. John Mark grew in his ministry to have the highest esteem for His Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, for towards the end of his ministry, now writing this *Gospel*, he sets out to exalt His Master. Jesus Christ is set forth as both God and Man, and His Lordship as King is clearly manifest.

William Hendrikson comments:

‘Mark’s aim is that men everywhere may accept this Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God, this conquering King, as their Saviour and Lord.’

The Gospel of Mark

With these principles of belief Mark, inspired by the Holy Spirit, writes in a compact, vivid and orderly manner. His opening statement sets forth his object – his writing is all about ‘*the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*’ (Mark 1.1).

- Jesus – Saviour of the world Who will certainly save;
- Christ – the anointed Messiah, set apart and ordained of God;
- The Son of God – His deity.

We are left in no doubt right at the outset that this is all about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the good news of salvation for needy sinners through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The word ‘beginning’ that Mark uses at the outset, in its deepest sense has do with the eternal pre-existence of Jesus Christ as Son of God. The Apostle John commenced his *Gospel*:

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ John 1.1.

But ‘the beginning’ also refers in a time sense to the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel in the New Testament era.

2. THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Mark 1.1-8

‘The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

‘John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him all the land of Judæa, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. And John was clothed with camel’s hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; and preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.’

We have noted in the first chapter that Mark’s motive was to set forth the Kingship and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Before a king arrived in those days he was preceded by a herald announcing his coming. So it is here that Mark commences his *Gospel* by making specific reference to the ministry of John the Baptist.

John the Baptist was a preparer

The ministry of John the Baptist was ground-breaking in its message. It paved the way for the full Gospel. He was a messenger that went before to announce the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. John’s ministry, under God, prepared the heart to receive the Gospel

The Gospel of Mark

of Jesus Christ. His ministry was a sure stepping stone that led to the full Gospel of Jesus Christ.

His ministry pointed to Jesus Christ and prepared the way for Him.

'Prepare ye the way of the Lord', for His way is the only Way;

'Make his paths straight' that there will be a clear, straight road for the Gospel.

John the Baptist was a preacher

His message was radical inasmuch as he was telling the people one is not born a believer. John preached the doctrine of true conversion, a change of heart. He did this by preaching the Law of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to the conviction of the conscience.

He taught the doctrine of repentance for the remission of sins. We can see right at the beginning of John's Gospel message that repentance is fundamental to conversion.

What is repentance? Repentance means to be convicted of your personal sin and your own sinful condition, in that you have rebelled and acted against God's perfect Law. Repentance means to acknowledge there is a holy, just and perfect God before Whom you are accountable. Repentance means to confess your own personal sin before God to receive forgiveness in Christ. Then, with God's help, to forsake sin in your life and follow Christ Jesus. Repentance is part of the ultimate 'u-turn' from darkness to light, from death unto life.

John the Baptist preached this repentance and the need of confession of sins leading to forgiveness. His message was clear: no forgiveness without repentance and confession of sins. So it was that many people gathered to hear his clear message and responded, confessing their sins, demonstrating this repentance, this radical change, by baptism. Their baptism pictured the cleansing of their sins and the change from their old sinful self to newness of life.

The Ministry of John the Baptist

John the Baptist was a plain pioneer man

Not only was he a pioneer in the manner in which he preached repentance for the remission of sins to all, but he was a pioneer in that he preached his message outside of the Temple and the synagogue. The people from all Judea and Jerusalem went to him in the wilderness.

He was a pioneer in that he did not wear robes of office – he dressed simply and plainly. In so doing John showed that the authority was in the Gospel message, the Word of God, not in the attire. So it should be for us today. Why do preachers not wear robes? Because we seek to show the authority is in the Word not in the man or the attire. This is what a pulpit demonstrates: the uniqueness of the Word, and the authority of the Word.

John was also a pioneer in the manner in which his whole ministry was centred upon the preaching of the Word. He was not a scribe or a teacher or a theologian of the Temple or synagogue. He was a preacher who spoke in the power of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist was a pointer

Right at the heart of John the Baptist's ministry was his constant pointing to Christ. He showed that all true preaching of the Gospel will ultimately point to Christ. John's Gospel message was a sure stepping stone to the full Gospel of God in Jesus Christ. He had a burning zeal to point to Christ: *'There cometh one mightier than I after me'* (verse 7).

But he also pointed to man: *'the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose'*. He was saying, I am not even worthy to take of this Man's dusty shoes after a journey, such is His authority. He points to man and then to Christ:

'I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost' Mark 1.8.

The Gospel of Mark

John also points to Christ and then to man:

'He must increase, but I must decrease' John 3.30.

'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' John 1.29.

'After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me' John 1.30.

'And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace' John 1.16.

Why emphasise this point so much? It is to show how John's ministry constantly pointed to two truths: the greatness of the Saviour Jesus Christ the Lord, and the smallness of man and his great need of salvation.

'There cometh one mightier than I.'

Please remember this wonderful truth in your minds. It is one of the most helpful directions for all time. It is a statement that leaves no room for pride: there is One mightier than I! There is

- a Ruler before Whom I must give an account, before Whom I should bow, to Whom I should submit.
- a King Who reigns in glory and majesty, Whose rule is perfect, wise, infallible and sovereign.

'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace' Isaiah 9.6.

- a Saviour Who is able to save *'them to the uttermost that come unto God by him'* Hebrews 7.25.
- a Shepherd Who guides and protects, and with eternal care preserves the souls of His saints.

The Ministry of John the Baptist

'Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle' Psalm 24.8.

- an Intercessor Who understands all about us, yet sympathises with our weaknesses and presents us perfect.
- a Judge Who is coming to the world at the end of time before Whom all will stand as saved or unsaved. This mighty truth that John states regarding the first coming of Jesus Christ is true also for His second coming.

'Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty' Psalm 45.3.

'And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth' Revelation 19.6.

Mightier than I, infinite in power, wisdom, glory and majesty, the One in Whom *'dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily'* *Colossians 2.9.*

Notice the humility of John here in this verse:

'There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose' Mark 1.7.

He describes the most humble duty of the servant – unloosing a dusty, dirty, travel-worn sandal, and then cleaning it. He considers himself unworthy to perform the most menial task for His Master, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In a way this was one of the great strengths of John the Baptist's ministry: *'He must increase, but I must decrease'* (*John 3.30*).

He then emphasises the greatness and superior ministry of His Lord by making reference to baptism. John was baptising with water as an outward expression of a person's confession and repentance of their

The Gospel of Mark

sins. In comparison, the baptism of Christ is not a symbol and picture – it is a real spiritual experience. Salvation in Jesus Christ means being baptised with the Holy Spirit, being quickened into spiritual life by the Holy Spirit, and receiving the gift of sincere, wholehearted repentance and faith, a love for God, a willingness to submit to His Word, and a desire to follow Jesus Christ as Lord.

But John also refers to Jesus Christ sending the Holy Spirit to attend the preaching of the Gospel with power. This was evident on the day of Pentecost. The Gospel was then preached in different languages, every man hearing the message in their own language.

‘Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language’ Acts 2.6.

That day around three thousand people were converted as the Gospel was preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Gospel preached under the power of the Holy Spirit of God that exalts Christ and draws us to Him.

Conclusion

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Mark sets out at the beginning to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He does so by linking His coming to the fulfilment of Scripture in the ministry of His herald, John the Baptist.

He was a preparer, preacher, pioneer and pointer signposting us to Christ.

‘John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world’ John 1.29.

John was God’s messenger preparing the way of the Lord making a highway for our Saviour Jesus Christ. John had a message in the wilderness that there was coming a Saviour Who could deliver from the wilderness of sin, vanity, pride, idolatry, and despair. You can come

The Ministry of John the Baptist

up from the depths of this wilderness leaning on Him. This is the picture of the Church given for us in the *Song of Solomon*:

'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?' *Song of Solomon 8.5a.*

3. JESUS – IN WHOM THE FATHER IS WELL PLEASSED

Mark 1.9-11

‘And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’

We now consider two totally different experiences in the perfect life of Jesus the Son of God. The first experience, His anointing of the Holy Spirit, and Father’s commendation following His baptism, revealed His perfect harmony and union here on Earth with both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

The second experience in the wilderness of temptation, while walking as the perfect Man, revealed His submission to God’s will in His life on Earth, that He might in all points be afflicted as we are.

The obedience of Jesus to baptism

Jesus came from His hometown Nazareth which was a humble, somewhat despised, small town in Galilee. It was prophesied that the Messiah would be a Nazarene, and this verse therefore confirms the prophesy.

During His ministry here on Earth our Lord was often referred to as ‘Jesus of Nazareth’. At Calvary the writing put on the cross by Pilate was ‘*Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*’ After His resurrection the Lord Jesus appeared in His glory to Paul who was blinded by the brightness. But when Jesus spoke to Paul on that same occasion He referred to Himself simply as ‘Jesus of Nazareth’. While many used the

The Gospel of Mark

title 'Jesus of Nazareth' in a derogatory manner, Jesus used it humbly as the God-Man.

From this we can see that pure greatness and glory is not divorced from humility but is in harmony with it. We can use this title in our ministry to set forth the humility and yet the power and glory of our Saviour.

Peter also used this title when preaching on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured abundantly in conversions.

'Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know' Acts 2.22.

Later, when preaching at the house of Cornelius, he refers to the anointing of Jesus of Nazareth.

'...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him' Acts 10.38.

Here, in verses 9-13, the commencement of the public ministry of Jesus is revealed to us by baptism. Notice how the ministry begins with a remarkable action of obedience to fulfil the righteous will of the Father. In the *Gospel of Matthew* it is recorded that John was somewhat shocked to be asked of Jesus to be baptised. John, filled with the Holy Spirit, knew Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, the One from Whom all blessings flow. So in his own humble dependence upon the Messiah, he felt at once the need himself to be baptised by the Lord. But the Lord said that this step must be permitted for it was necessary to fulfil all righteousness. What did Jesus mean by this statement?

Baptism symbolises the death and resurrection of Christ, and the washing away of the sins of the believer: death to the old life and a new life in Christ. Jesus the Lord was sinless, but to fulfil all righteousness

Jesus – In Whom the Father is Well Pleased

for us, must needs take upon Himself our sin and guilt. He must suffer and die for our sins so that they may be washed away. He must rise again victorious over sin, death and hell that we ourselves might experience spiritual life in Him.

So it was that the Lord Jesus Christ was baptised, not for Himself but on behalf of sinners to provide a picture. It was a picture of what He must do to fulfil all righteousness on behalf of those who put their trust in Him. It was in perfect righteous obedience to His Father's will that He must humble Himself to take such a step. It was part of the righteous offering of His life to His Father in obedience to His will and His Word and His law. Christ came to fulfil all righteousness; He came to complete His work here on Earth, and every step was meaningful.

Baptism is an ordinance upon which the Lord Jesus places important emphasis as a clear sign of obedience. We read of it in the final commission given by Jesus here on Earth to the apostles:

'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen' Matthew 28.18-20.

Baptism is for believers. It is God's appointed way for believers to identify themselves by open profession of their faith. Baptism is a command for believers given by Jesus Christ to be followed for the glory of God.

Directly the Lord came up out of the River Jordan Jesus saw the heavens opened. The word 'opened' in the original means opened suddenly, like a curtain torn apart. The same word is used following the death of Jesus on the cross at Calvary when the Temple curtain was torn from top to bottom signifying access to Heaven through

The Gospel of Mark

Jesus Christ. So at the beginning of His public ministry the way to Heaven is revealed in Him. At the end of His public ministry the way to Heaven is confirmed in Him. Jesus Christ the risen Lord opened the way to Heaven for us by His work at Calvary, symbolised by baptism.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form like a dove, being visible to Jesus and John.

'And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost' John 1.32-33.

So this event was vitally important as a sign to John the Baptist: Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Messiah. The symbolism of the Holy Spirit as a dove is thought to refer to purity, peace and gentleness.

Now as the Son of God nothing could be added to His divinity, His deity or His all-sufficiency. However, as a perfect Man He both needed and desired the special anointing of the Holy Spirit for ministry. He humbled Himself as a Man to be dependent upon the Holy Spirit to bless His ministry on Earth.

'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound' Isaiah 61.1.

So we read in *Luke 4.1*:

'And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.'

Jesus – In Whom the Father is Well Pleased

We also read:

‘...and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord’ Isaiah 11.2.

‘...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him’ Acts 10.38.

So we need to remember our dependence on the filling of the Holy Spirit in our lives for effective ministry. This is an issue often referred to by the Apostle Paul when inspired by the Holy Spirit: he uses full-some language.

‘...and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God’ Ephesians 3.19.

‘And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit’ Ephesians 5.18.

‘...being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God’ Philippians 1.11.

‘For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding’ Colossians 1.9.

To have our lives captivated by God and His Word, to live for Him and die in Him, this is the life well pleasing to God!

So it is that God the Father uses such an occasion as the baptism of Jesus to express His delight in His Son; His delight in His obedience to fulfil all righteousness, and His determination to start His ministry according to His Father’s will. It is seen as the evidence of His Father’s pleasure in His life to this point – His dependence as a baby, His submission to His earthly parents, His perfect life, and His growth

The Gospel of Mark

in wisdom. Thirty years of obedience: that is over 260,000 hours of perfection, in pleasing His Father.

In His statement God the Father is harmonising with the Word of God in two places:

1. *'Thou art my beloved Son'* refers to *Psalm 2.7* where God the Father states *'Thou art my Son'*.

2. *'in whom I am well pleased'* refers to *Isaiah 42.1* where God the Father states:

'Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.'

Great dignity and authority is placed upon the Son, the One in Whom the Father delights. Do you delight in God the Son? Do you marvel at His obedience? Do you wonder at His humility? Do you marvel at His authority? He is the chosen One of God to be the Saviour and Lord (see *Psalm 2*).

This event is filled with comfort and assurance for the believer. The Son was baptised in the River Jordan symbolising death and resurrection and our cleansing from sin. The believer's time of death is often referred to as crossing the River Jordan to the heavenly Canaan land. If we are buried with Him we will also live with Him in glory in the heavenly Canaan land.

This event is filled with comfort and assurance for believers by the triune God. The Son by baptism affirmed His determination in love to fulfil all righteousness and be the Saviour of sinners. The Holy Spirit strengthened and anointed the Son to enable Him to fulfil His Holy mission of love. The Father rent Heaven apart that His voice might be heard to assure His Son of His love and pleasure.

Luke records that Christ's obedience included prayer. It was while

Jesus – In Whom the Father is Well Pleased

He prayed and after this step of obedience that the heavens were opened. This demonstrates the significance of prayer.

At the beginning of Jesus's public ministry the way to Heaven was revealed in Him. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit for public ministry.

4. JESUS – TEMPTED BY SATAN

Mark 1.12-13

‘And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.’

The submission of Jesus to be tempted

The holy and awesome events in the previous verses were followed by the affirmation of God the Father speaking from Heaven: *‘This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.’* A time of pure blessing was to be immediately followed by a time of deep temptation. The Holy Spirit drove Christ, the willing servant of God, into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Why?

- That He might be *‘in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin’* Hebrews 4.15.
- To fulfil the prophecy that *‘in all our affliction he was afflicted’* Isaiah 63.9.

It was a terrible time for Jesus. The wilderness was a place of danger and darkness, inhabited by wild beasts: wolves, jackals, leopards, and hyenas. Although a real experience, the wild beasts symbolise for us the wretchedness and danger of temptation.

The Lord went for forty days without food, for forty days was assaulted by the devil, and spent forty days without another human being in sight.

What a difference between the action of the first Adam and the second Adam, Christ, in temptation! The first Adam was living in paradise, in perfection, in security, peace and happiness with the comfort of Eve. In the midst of pure blessing and favour they deliberately chose to disobey God and listen to the devil’s lies. The second

The Gospel of Mark

Adam was in the wilderness surrounded with wild beasts and on His own, fasting and in prayer. There He was assaulted constantly by Satan, culminating in temptations of the severest manner. Yet He withstood the devil to the point that he departed from Him for a season.

In the *Gospel of Matthew* chapter 4 we are given a description of the final assault of Satan in the wilderness. This passage helps us to learn the pattern Jesus set in resisting the devil in temptation.

The first recorded temptation – satisfaction of physical need

‘Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God’ Matthew 4.1-4.

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness carries similarities to that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Apostle John describes the nature of it as *‘the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life’* (1 John 2.16). But notice, however, the difference in the circumstances surrounding the temptation. Adam and Eve were living in paradise, they were amply provided for providentially and spiritually. God was present in the Garden of Eden and delighted to commune with His created human beings. There were therefore no mitigating circumstances. Whereas the second Adam, Jesus Christ, was in the wilderness with the wild beasts for forty days and nights. He had no food, no comforts for the body and no human company. Satan’s final great assault of temptation came after forty days and nights of fasting. In His human body Jesus was starving, so it was in the context of bread that Satan brings his assault.

Please remember that Satan is an evil and terrible foe and only wants our destruction unto eternal death. We need also to remember that

Jesus – Tempted by Satan

Satan is the great deceiver, the great questioner of God and His purposes. Notice how he said to Eve, *'Has God indeed said?'* Notice how Satan starts with Jesus: *'If thou be the Son of God'*. Please remember that if you are tempted to question God and His dealings, the source is always Satan. The *'if thou be'* and the *'has God indeed said'* questioning, if allowed to fester in the mind as an attitude, damages our souls and communion with God.

So we will notice how direct and decisive Jesus was in His manner of dealing with the wiles of the devil. He came to destroy the works of the devil and show us how to resist him. Jesus showed us that the way to resist the devil is by using the Word of God. In the final analysis it was the Word of God that Satan was questioning.

Remember the last words of God the Father before the start of this deep testing and trial were, *'Thou art my beloved Son'*. God the Father was stating an eternal truth: Jesus is the Son of God. Satan started his final assault in the wilderness by questioning the Word of God – *'If thou be the Son of God'*.

So it was that Jesus uses the Word of God in His defence against Satan, for the trustworthiness of the Word of God was really what was at the heart of the question. There is no way that Jesus is going to bypass the veracity and significance of the Word of God. Jesus takes His stand and His sword and states, *'It is written'*. Let us see this working out in practice.

Satan tempts Jesus to make stones into bread not only to quell His hunger but prove His divinity. He is called upon to prove His divinity by doing something for Himself, when His call was specifically to give His life for others. The evil nature of Satan is clearly evidenced here in the insidious nature of what lies behind the temptation. One of Satan's greatest temptations is to move us into selfish thinking, living just for self, or feeling sorry for ourselves. He seeks to tempt us to carve out a life for ourselves devoid of sacrifice, to care just for the body. Satan

The Gospel of Mark

tempts us to doubt the providential care of the Lord and to distrust His sovereign care.

He comes to Jesus when weak and exhausted and suggests He works a miracle to gratify His hunger. Why wait any longer? Why should the Son of God (if You are) sit and starve? Why not command that these stones be made bread for You? Bypass the will of the Father for you.

The response of Jesus shows to us that ultimately our spiritual life is more important than our physical life, that as God's people we do not live only for time, only for the body, only for the physical. The Christian has a wider dimension to his life; he also live and survive by spiritual food. This food is found in the Word of God.

So Jesus replies to Satan, *'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'* Matthew 4.4.

Jesus is saying to Satan, 'I trust the Word of God. It is the final Court of Appeal for reason and decisions.' He quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy where the Children of Israel were taught the meaning of the manna. God provided in loving care a diet of food so suitable for the body previously unknown to man. In so doing He was teaching them a lesson: there is a vital spiritual dimension that can only be met by the Word of the Lord.

'And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord' Deuteronomy 8.2-3.

Jesus – Tempted by Satan

The second recorded temptation – to be a superman

‘Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God’ Matthew 4.5-7.

Here we have the devil using Scripture. Beware! Satan can use Scripture in an evil way. It is as though Satan is saying: ‘If You so much like quoting Scripture at me then I will do the same to You.’ The devil is not particular about what or who he uses to serve his own ends. But the devil is not wise in using Scripture in its right context or using accurate hermeneutics. He takes Scripture out of context. Beware of using Satan’s method of carelessly using an odd text here and there to serve your ends.

Let me show you what I mean. Satan was quoting from *Psalm 91* which reads:

‘Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation’ Psalm 91.9-16.

The Gospel of Mark

Here the temptation was to presumptuously use Scripture and demand the protection of God. In other words, to wilfully and arrogantly test God's Word at the behest of Satan. But notice how Satan stops at verse 11, for the next verse prophesies the Lord's victory over him! Also, beware of Satan tempting you to take the name of the Lord in vain in a presumptuous manner.

Here Jesus is being tempted to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple, a height of 450 feet (136 metres). The response of Jesus to the temptation of presumption is, *'It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'*. You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

The third recorded temptation – worldly ambition

'Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him'
Matthew 4.8-11.

The devil does have power but it is limited. The devil does have control of principalities and powers set against God; he is the ruler of the kingdom of the air; he is the leader of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms; he exercises a powerful influence for evil over the lives of unbelievers; he exercises authority over evil spirits that acknowledge him as master. But here Satan appears to exceed his authority and power. As an angel of light he claims ultimate authority over the kingdoms of the world. On the top of the mountain viewing Canaan land he puts a whole vision before the mind of Jesus. In a moment, suddenly and quickly, all the kingdoms of the world are shown to Jesus. So it is that the devil comes to Jesus as a god, as though he had ultimate power and authority of all the kingdoms of the world and it was his to give away.

Jesus – Tempted by Satan

Now Jesus knew that actually He had been pre-appointed Ruler by His Father, God:

‘Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession’ Psalm 2.6-8.

So if Jesus knew Satan to be a liar, where was the power of the temptation? The temptation presented to Jesus by the devil was to rule the world without Gethsemane or Calvary; to have the power and the glory of being a leader of men, but not have the burden of being a Saviour of men at Calvary. We know from the account of Gethsemane that the agony of mind He endured on this issue as a Man was very real. He prayed to His Father, ‘If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt’ Matthew 26.39.

Here on the mountain all Jesus had to do was to go on His knees before Satan in a brief act of idol worship. Just do this once: You can do it in secret, no one can see You here in the wilderness. One session on your knees, Jesus, and that will be enough. The reward will be the honour, praise and glory of the world, to be the king of the world. Jesus responds:

‘Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve’ Luke 4.8.

Get behind Me, Satan: here is the root problem of temptation – Satan putting himself and his suggestions before us in place of God. Here is the epicentre of worldliness. Godliness means to be looking towards God in front. Worldliness means to be looking towards Satan in front. Worship is to be to God and Him alone – He alone is worthy of all our praise and adoration. Jesus is saying, I came to do the will of My Father, and as a perfect Man I worship Him and Him alone.

The Gospel of Mark

Conclusion

'Now when the devil had ended every temptation...' Luke 4.13.

'He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin'
Hebrews 4.15.

The devil tried every means possible through the pathway of temptation to overthrow Jesus. Eventually he departed as a defeated foe, angry and determined to regroup and attack again some other time. From this we learn that we are in a warfare against Satan, and only in Christ and in the Way can we conquer. The best way to get the devil behind you and departing from you is to use the Word of God properly, but always remember that as long as we are in this world the devil will use every opportunity to attack.

- The devil is a fearful foe who will use all means to assault Christ and His Church;
- The devil uses Scripture, but always in the wrong manner and for evil ends;
- Christ used God's Word purely to resist Satan believing in its power and authority and truth;
- He showed the way to resist the devil that he might flee from us – resistance by the Word and in the will of God.

'The Bible was the only book Jesus ever quoted and then never as a basis for discussion but to decide the point at issue.' Leon Morris

Jesus responded to Satan firmly, biblically, and truthfully as the perfect Man.

I close with this illustration. As the Union Pacific Railroad was being constructed, an elaborate trestle bridge was built across a large canyon in the West. Wanting to test the bridge, the builder loaded a train with enough extra cars and equipment to double its normal payload. The train was then driven to the middle of the bridge, where

Jesus – Tempted by Satan

it stayed an entire day. One worker asked, 'Are you trying to break this bridge?' 'No,' the builder replied, 'I'm trying to prove that the bridge won't break.' In the same way, the temptations Jesus faced were not designed to see if He would sin, but to prove that He would not.

There is a wonderful comfort for believers set forth in the submission of Jesus to be tempted of the devil.

- He was willing to suffer temptation;
- He was victorious over Satan, and we ourselves have the victory in Him;
- He demonstrated how to use the Word of God to resist Satan;
- He understood that enduring temptation was part of His obedience to the will of God the Father;
- He endured that we might have greater confidence in His ability and understanding as our High Priest.

One final word of encouragement. Remember when Jesus prayed the heavens opened. We also read in *Matthew* that on this occasion, after Jesus had so assuredly used the Word of God, Satan departed and angels came and ministered to Him. By prayer and the Word of God Satan is defeated and God's comforting presence is ministered.

5. JESUS – PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Mark 1.14-15

‘Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.’

The ministry of John the Baptist has come to a conclusion. He is now incarcerated in prison for the sake of the truth. This event transpired because John had rebuked king Herod for stealing his brother Philip’s wife. Herodias herself violently reacted against John for this faithful rebuke. It was she who persuaded adulterous Herod to have John the Baptist imprisoned. After this sad event the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, comes into Galilee preaching the Gospel.

The account of the commencement of the ministry of the Lord Jesus harmonises perfectly with Old Testament prophecy. This is important as it affirms our faith in the authority of the Lord Jesus and verifies that He is indeed the true Messiah. We will look at two examples of this harmony between the prophecy and its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. These examples also teach us something of the flavour of the unique ministry of the Lord Jesus.

‘Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan,

The Gospel of Mark

Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' Matthew 4.12-17.

Here is the great light – God's pure light, God's answer in Jesus Christ to those in darkness. How sad when people are looking away from Christ to find the light, for Christ is the Light of the world.

Recently I heard a person assure a dying man that the light he was seeking was the community around him. Jesus said,

'If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness' Matthew 6.23.

He is the perfect preacher with a perfect message of salvation bringing light, hope and peace with God in Him.

Our second example is found in *Luke*:

'And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

Jesus – Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

‘And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth’ Luke 4.14-22.

Here the comforting, delivering, healing nature of the Gospel ministry of the Lord Jesus is expressed: preach the Gospel – heal the spiritually broken-hearted – deliver the spiritual captives – recover the sight of the spiritually blind – set at liberty those bruised by Satan and sin. All that heard Him wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth. This was pure preaching. We may reject the broken, unworthy sentences and proclamation of a preacher, and even despise his elocution, but always take heed of the words of the supreme preacher, Jesus Christ.

It is He who said at the end of His Sermon on the Mount:

‘Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes’ Matthew 7.24-29.

Jesus also said:

‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls’ Matthew 11.28-29.

The Gospel of Mark

Take heed of the perfect promising words of the Lord Jesus.

In *Mark's Gospel* we have, in keeping with his style of writing, a more direct description of Christ's ministry. In verses 14-15 Mark teaches us the Gospel nature of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we consider those verses we need to address two questions and two directives:

Questions: 'What is the Gospel?' and 'What is the Kingdom of God?'

Directives: 'Repent', and, 'Believe the Gospel'.

Two Questions

1. What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is God's message of good news proclaiming salvation to sinners through His Son, Jesus Christ. Without this good news of the Gospel of God there would be no hope for sinners in this world. The Gospel is essential for us to believe so that we may be saved and gain entrance to Heaven. The Gospel is essential for us to believe because there is no other way to be right with God.

The Gospel is God's message, revealing God's answer to the problem of our sin and rebellion against God. The Gospel reveals the reality of God's holiness, justice, love, grace, mercy, and compassion. God is holy – we are unholy by nature. God's law is holy – we have broken His law. It is impossible for us to save ourselves, or make ourselves right with God, or to satisfy His justice against our sin. We are utterly unable to save ourselves, utterly helpless to meet the demands of God's holy and just law. But God is love. He has made it possible for us to be saved, forgiven, reconciled with Him, and at peace with Him. This good news God the Father has made possible through the work of God the Son, Jesus Christ the Lord, and God the Holy Spirit.

Firstly, God the Son, Jesus Christ the Lord, came from Heaven and took upon Himself a body like ours and lived here on Earth as a perfect Man. He lived a life of perfect and total obedience to the holy law

Jesus – Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

of God and satisfied it in every respect. He preached the good news of the Gospel of God for salvation, affirming its message with countless miracles.

At the end of His ministry here on Earth He willingly went to Calvary's cross. There He suffered in the place of needy sinners the eternal punishment due for their sins. At the end of this miraculous, solemn, and awesome event He cried, *'It is finished'*, meaning 'God's justice is satisfied.' He then gave up His spirit voluntarily in death on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sinners before God. After three days He arose victorious over sin, death and hell to reign in Heaven as the risen, living Saviour-Lord. Now He lives in Heaven at the right hand of God the Father to make intercession for all who call upon Him.

Someone described the Gospel like this: It 'tells rebellious men that God is reconciled, that justice is satisfied, that sin has been atoned for, that the judgment of the guilty may be revoked, the condemnation of the sinner cancelled, the curse of the law blotted out, the gates of hell closed, the portals of Heaven opened wide, the power of sin subdued, the guilty conscience healed, the broken heart comforted, the sorrow and misery of the Fall undone.'

Secondly, God the Holy Spirit has been sent to this Earth to enable us in our minds and hearts to repent and believe the Gospel. It is the Holy Spirit that reveals to us the truth of God's Word, the Bible, and shows us our need of a Saviour. It is the Holy Spirit that enables conversion from darkness to light and gives to us spiritual life (see *Ephesians 2*).

We are asking the question, 'What is the Gospel?' Let us conclude by hearing the words of:

a. Jesus

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' John 3.16.

The Gospel of Mark

b. The Apostle Paul

'He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?' Romans 8.32.

'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' 1 Corinthians 15.1-4.

'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' 2 Corinthians 5.20-21.

2. What is the Kingdom of God?

We should banish from our mind any thought that the Kingdom of God is an earthly, political kingdom. It was this belief that caused some of the severest rejection of Jesus Christ here on Earth. At the height of the popularity of His teaching and miraculous ministry the people sought to make Him a king. The people wanted a king to defeat the Roman Empire to make the Jewish nation great again. But throughout His ministry Jesus decisively rejected any such attempt to so degrade the Kingdom of God. Rather we can learn from the teaching of Scripture that:

a. The Kingdom of God is firstly His spiritual rule in the life of the believer who is trusting in Jesus Christ:

'For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' Romans 14.17.

Jesus – Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

- b.** The Kingdom of God is eternal and everlasting:

‘For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ 2 Peter 1.11.

- c.** The Kingdom of God is immovable:

‘Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear’ Hebrews 12.28.

- d.** The Kingdom of God is received only by God’s Holy Spirit:

‘Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God’ John 3.3.

- e.** The Kingdom of God must be received in humility:

‘Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein’ Luke 18.17.

- f.** The Kingdom of God is constantly growing in time:

‘And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it’ Mark 4.30-32.

- g.** The Kingdom of God is God’s good pleasure to give:

‘Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom’ Luke 12.32.

- h.** The Kingdom of God is the Church of the living God. It is only made up of God’s redeemed children saved in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of Mark

i. The Kingdom of God's fulfilment will be in the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

Two Directives

1. Repent

The original word for repentance was first used in a culture where people were essentially nomadic. They lived in a world with no maps or street signs. It is easy to get lost walking through the desert. You become aware that the countryside is strange. You finally say to yourself, 'I'm going in the wrong direction.' That is the first act of repentance, a personal acknowledgement of the problem.

The second act of repentance is to go in an alternative direction. The New Testament word for repentance means changing one's mind so that one's views, values, goals, and ways are changed and one's whole life is lived differently. The change is radical, both inwardly and outwardly; mind and judgment, will and affections, behaviour and lifestyle, motives and purposes, are all involved.

Repentance means to consider the true situation about your condition before God under conviction of sin. It means to think seriously, sincerely, and honestly about your true state. Repentance is being honest with yourself about yourself to God. Repenting means starting to live a new life towards God, as opposed to living it away from God. True repentance means more than just saying sorry to God, and confessing our sins before God, feeling the burden of guilt because we are convicted of our sin. Repentance also includes having a real desire, or intent or commitment, to forsake that sin.

Repentance means sorrow for sin, confession of that sin before God, and a forsaking of the sin. True repentance leads us to a hatred of sin!

'Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow

Jesus – Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death’ 2 Corinthians 7.9-10.

It is also helpful for us to remember that repentance is not something passive; it is active, it changes us! So repentance does not mean turning away from sin to an empty void, a dull meaningless life. Repentance means turning away from sin and coming in humility to God for forgiveness and new life in Christ Jesus. True repentance always means a change for the better. It involves our whole being.

2. Believe

Here the Son of God made Man, Jesus Christ, exhorts us to both repent and believe. He makes a general call in His preaching to His hearers knowing that, sadly, not all will heed the call. Nevertheless the call must go out for God’s honour and for God’s glory and for the sake of those who will hear.

To believe the Gospel means to put your trust wholeheartedly in God’s message of good news. It is to believe in the Person of the Gospel message, Jesus Christ, as your Saviour and Lord. It means to trust in God’s Word; it means to trust in Jesus Christ as God’s provision for you as a sinner; it means to reject any belief in, or dependence on, anything for your salvation apart from Jesus Christ; it means to sincerely and wholeheartedly take the Lord Jesus, Who cannot lie, at His holy word.

Bishop J C Ryle said:

‘What is the life of saving faith, when once begun, but a continual leaning on an unseen Saviour’s Word?’

‘But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name’ John 20.31.

‘And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment’ 1 John 3.23.

The Gospel of Mark

*Upon a life I did not live ,
Upon a death I did not die,
Another's life, Another's death,
I stake my whole eternity.*

Horatius Bonar, 1808-89

*I am not skilled to understand,
What God has willed, what God has planned,
I only know at His right hand,
Stands one who is my Saviour.*

Dorothy Greenwell, 1821-82

6. JESUS – CALLING HIS DISCIPLES

Mark 1.16-20

‘Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him. And when he had gone a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.’

God in His wisdom and grace has chosen to build His kingdom using the labours of His children. This is a remarkable evidence of how God condescends to work in partnership with His children. So here the Lord Jesus Christ is calling disciples to follow Him and serve God in the full-time ministry.

The Lord Jesus could have been totally independent in His ministry and accomplished all Himself. After His return to Heaven the Holy Spirit could have built God’s Kingdom independently from God’s children. However this is not God’s way; rather He chooses to call and equip His children to serve Him. So it is that, according to His sovereign grace, He builds His Church using the labours of His children. While we know salvation is all of God’s grace in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, nevertheless God harmonises His sovereign work using the labours of His children as channels for His blessing.

This passage reminds us of the privilege and importance of labouring for the Lord in our day and age. Here the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, is calling disciples to serve alongside Him under His

The Gospel of Mark

leadership. So today God calls His children to serve Him in various ways working as unto the Lord and for His glory.

The call

Here the Lord is calling Simon and Andrew, and later James and John, into full-time ministry. While not all are called to leave their secular employment to serve in full-time ministry, all Christian believers are to be full-time in their following the Lord whatever their calling in this world. We work as unto the Lord; we care as unto the Lord; we give as unto the Lord; and we serve as unto the Lord. There are, in this call of the Lord, certain characteristics that are common to all believers, albeit the main focus here is on the call of the Lord to full-time pastoral and preaching ministry.

a. The call was particular

Now as the Lord walked by the Sea of Galilee there were no doubt a number of fishermen working on their nets, but the Lord did not invite, or call, or interview, a number of candidates and then make His choice. Here the Lord specifically called Simon and Andrew. They were, in God's sovereign pleasure, called to serve. A little further along the sea shore the Lord called James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

In the *Gospel of Luke* we are told that before He chose His disciples the Lord spent all night in prayer unto God. From this we learn that the call into the full-time ministry is a particular call, and a personal call. Simon and Andrew did not apply for this ministry; they were called into the ministry according to God's will.

No man takes this honour unto himself. If we imagine ourselves as a minister, or imagine ourselves in the pulpit, or desire the pulpit, this is not a call. Every true sent servant of the Lord is called into the ministry by the Lord. Jesus said to them, '*Come ye after me*'.

b. The call was sacrificial

Straightway they forsook their nets and followed the Lord. They

Jesus – Calling His Disciples

turned their back on accumulated wealth and on future prospects of business. So it is with the call into full-time ministry. It means laying aside ambition to be a servant of others. It is a call that requires dying to self, that requires faithfulness. It is not a career move, and not a 'nine-to-five' job! It requires taking up our cross and following the Lord wherever and to whoever He chooses.

c. The call was compelling

When Simon, Andrew, James and John were called by the Lord they immediately responded. James and John left their father Zebedee in the ship, for this call superabounded family ties.

One of the more recent manifestations of the slide of the Church into a more materialistic, secular outlook is evidenced in the way a minister views his employment. A minister is not so much called these days but rather it seems he applies for a position along with others. The applicants are asked to provide their CVs and a committee set up to make the appointment considers these. A shortlist is produced and these candidates are invited to come to demonstrate their preaching skills to the church.

I have heard prospective ministers discuss location, family ties and desirable areas to work before deciding where to apply. Hours are dictated to the church, sabbaticals arranged, and limitations put on the amount of sermons to prepare.

But a minister does not choose a church; he does not choose a location nor apply for a position. No. A minister is called by God to preach and called by the local church to be their pastor. In the New Testament pattern a minister did not apply for a position as pastor; he was called by God and the church. Nowhere do we read of preachers in the New Testament applying for positions. They were chosen and appointed as elders by the local church, who recognised they were called by God.

The Gospel of Mark

This call is compelling in the heart. It superabounds all other considerations. It is a unique call.

d. The call was equipping

It is good for us to notice something very significant in the wording of Jesus here. He said, *'I will make you fishers of men'*. They were going to be equipped of God to serve Him. We know these fishermen were given great theological minds to comprehend deep truths. Simon Peter had to develop in his thinking to understand the greatness of God's mercy to Jew and Gentile. They were given ability to study to show themselves workmen approved unto God (2 Timothy 2.15).

The later epistles of Peter and John are clear evidence of the thorough grounding these men had in doctrine. Look at the way Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, begins his first letter.

'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time' 1 Peter 1.1-5.

The Lord made them able preachers of the Word as they applied themselves diligently to their call. James was known as a pillar of the Church. They were made able preachers and pastors, fishers of men. The Lord made them, He equipped them, He called them and He appointed their places to serve.

Jesus – Calling His Disciples

If we are called by the Lord, we will also be equipped by the Lord as He blesses our labours in the Word. The point here is that the equipping goes with the call, and this equipping becomes evident to the church. The Lord, the Head of the Church, calls a man to the ministry and equips him; the church sends him to preach.

For example, in the case of a brother exercised as to a call into the ministry, the local church is the first place to test the call to allow the members to discern if the person is equipped. There may be occasions when the church does not discern a gift and will kindly express this reservation. But if there is a call from the Lord and an equipping, then the church will discern this in the ministry.

The Lord calls and the Lord makes fishers of men. The call to the ministry is unique, ordered by the Lord.

The commission

The Lord in His commission changes their occupation from the material to the spiritual. So it is with the call into the ministry. Our focus moves from the material to the spiritual; it moves from the body to the soul and from time things to eternal things. They forsook their nets and followed Jesus.

It places a solemn responsibility upon a minister to see his role as a catcher of men, a spiritual fisherman. The net provided is the net of the Gospel. As the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit draws souls to Christ. So it is that the Lord makes the minister, equips the minister, and provides the message 'net' for the minister. To be a fisher of men we need to use the Gospel net that God provides. Any other net is inadequate. James and John were in the boat mending their nets. Any other net than the Gospel will break.

There is something significant in the symbolism God is using in calling four fishermen in this way. This call of the Lord teaches us that God can take men of humble origin and equip them for His service. God has often chosen to work in this manner. Jesus Christ makes

The Gospel of Mark

fishers of men. He gives wisdom, grace, spiritual maturity, and understanding.

As the fishermen would constantly be letting down their nets and drawing the fish in, so a fisher of men must constantly let down his net and preach the Gospel. Fishermen are known for being hard workers, so the minister is called to be a labourer. Fishermen are known for their bravery in the deep; the minister is called to labour in the deep waters of study in God's Word, of opposition and testing.

Fishermen have to work sometimes in stormy conditions, so the minister is called to lead, encourage and support people in these stormy conditions. Fishermen sometimes have to work difficult hours to catch the fish. The minister is on call like a lifeboat man.

The servant of the Lord must dismiss from his mind all secular, worldly means of fishing for souls. He must dismiss from his mind any thought of running the spiritual affairs of the church like a business. Souls are not a marketing commodity to be caught in a communication net. Souls are precious in God's sight and are saved according to His grace by the net of the Gospel in Christ, and then nurtured by God's Word.

The Apostle Peter, one of these fishermen first called by the Lord Jesus by the Sea of Galilee, wrote in his letter:

'The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock' 1 Peter 5.1-3.

The Commander

This passage reminds us of the decisive authority of the Lord Jesus

Jesus – Calling His Disciples

and the impact of His call. He uses expressions such as ‘Come after Me’, and, ‘I will make’. The disciples’ response was straight away to forsake their nets and follow Him; immediately He called them they left their father and the hired servants and went after Him. From the outset the Lord commanded authority. He did so with humility, meekness, grace, love and sincerity.

It is clear from the faithful testimony of the *Gospels* that the Lord spoke with authority and effect. Those in the synagogue were astonished:

‘And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes’ Mark 1.22.

‘And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son?’ Luke 4.22.

‘Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come’ John 7.30.

This passage reminds us of the leadership, Lordship and power of Jesus Christ as Head of the Church. Here must be our starting point. The Lord is the Head of the Church, its Foundation, Cornerstone, and Shepherd.

As the disciples responded to His authority, leadership, teaching, and example, so today His servants are also called to do the same. We are not our own – we serve our Master. This truth is somewhat liberating when overwhelmed with the fear of man which brings a snare (*Proverbs 29.25*).

Our Commander Jesus Christ is almighty, infinite in wisdom and knowledge. He is love and truth; He is gracious and merciful. He calls His servants personally to follow Him, to serve Him, to preach of Him, and to preach His message.

7. JESUS – CASTING IN AND CASTING OUT

Mark 1.21-34

In the record given by Mark of the ministry of the Lord Jesus here there are two distinct characteristics. He is casting in by authoritative teaching into the soul and He is casting out unclean spirits. When Jesus casts into the soul He always does so purely, profitably, justly, wisely, and for spiritual blessing. When Jesus casts out He is always dealing with our sin, opposition, evil influence, and the enemy of souls.

Jesus casting in – His teaching ministry

And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes' Mark 1.21-22.

There were two particular aspects to His teaching ministry that caused a tremendous stir among the people: His doctrine and His authority.

The Lord Jesus taught the doctrines of God's grace, and this teaching had been lacking in the synagogue. The Jewish leaders had by now laid on the people an intolerable list of rules and regulations. Going to the synagogue was not a joyful experience; the Sabbath day was not a delight to the soul. They had to endure long, monotonous sermons that only served to increase their legalistic burdens, whereas Jesus taught grace, love, mercy, truth and justice and did so with authority and life and power.

Jesus magnified the Law by teaching salvation by grace, not works, and repentance and faith.

The Gospel of Mark

'For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' John 1.17.

The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ to be freely saved by grace alone in Christ alone (*Galatians 3.24*). Jesus taught observance of the law from the heart, living as a true believer marked by love to God and other people. So it was that there was this comparison made by people who had been starved spiritually by the scribes.

- Jesus spoke the truth (*'I am...the truth' John 14.6*); the scribes were corrupt and employed evasive reasoning.
- Jesus presented matters of great significance relating to life, death and eternity; the scribes taught trivialities.

'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone' Matthew 23.23.

- Jesus taught with a logic, a pattern and a system to help the mind; the scribes were known for their ramblings.
- Jesus inspired curiosity and made use of suitable illustrations. (See for example *Mark 4.2-9*, the parable of the sower.) Scribes' messages were known as dry.
- Jesus spoke as a Person Who loved people, concerned for their everlasting welfare; the scribes were hard and unconcerned about the soul spiritually –

'...which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers' Mark 12.40.

'But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' Matthew 9.13.

- Jesus spoke with authority, to the mind and heart from the mind and heart of God; scribes retailed the Talmud.

Jesus – Casting In and Casting Out

When Jesus taught He cast in blessing, truth, conviction, hope, peace, and the Gospel of God. The people were astonished, deeply moved and affected in the soul. So it is with conversion. We are:

astonished by conviction – I didn't realise what a wretched, hell-deserving sinner I am;

astonished by grace – I am amazed by the grace that God in Christ should bestow salvation freely to me;

'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief' 1 Timothy 1.15.

astonished by mercy – I am amazed for I have been delivered by God in Christ from the wrath I deserve;

astonished by love – I am amazed to find by faith that God has an everlasting love for me.

Note the testimonies of Ruth: 'Why have I found favour with Boaz?' and Paul: 'This grace is found in the worst of sinners.' Part of the problem in this day and age is that we seem to have lost the astonishment of the Gospel in our minds.

Notice also here that the emphasis of Christ was on preaching, then healing. His miracles were a support to ministry.

Jesus casting out – His deliverance ministry

'And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what

The Gospel of Mark

new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him. And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee'
Mark 1.23-28.

The deliverance ministry of Jesus was sure, certain and total in its impact on a person. Each time the Lord delivered a beset person, He showed He had total authority over demonic activity. Why was it, during the ministry of Jesus, that there was so much demonic activity among men and women? It was because Satan was waging war against Christ and was commanding a host of demons to the battle. But in this battle the Lord demonstrated His superior authority over the evil principalities and powers.

Notice here also that demons recognise the power of the Lord Jesus Christ over them. They recognised they were evil and He was holy. Indeed, they address Him as *'the Holy One of God'*. Demons know there is a God and that His Son Jesus Christ is the Holy One of God. Demons obviously do not believe God for salvation, but rather their belief is begrudging, hateful, and irreverent. It will be like that on the Day of Judgment when unbelievers will acknowledge that after all there is a God. All their life they have been saying, 'Let us alone. What have we to do with Thee?' 'Let us alone to do what we want to do.' 'Leave us to ourselves and our own devices.' 'Let us alone we do not want your rule, authority or power over us.' Deep down in your heart you may be saying, 'Let me alone to do what I want to do. I will not have this Man Jesus to reign over me!'

But the demons already know in the 'here and now' that the Lord is almighty. They fear their destruction, knowing Jesus has the power to send them to hell. They prefer to stay in the man. But these demons had no power to withstand the withdrawing power of the Lord to bring them out of the man, for even the unclean spirits obey Him. The Lord can stop their disturbed, confusing, evil witnessing activity.

Jesus – Casting In and Casting Out

Such power of Christ over demonic activity made a deep impression on the onlookers. They had been astonished at the teaching of Jesus and were now amazed at the delivering power of Jesus. The miracles of the Lord were given to provide not only relief for the sufferer but teaching about salvation. There is no power that can withstand the delivering power of God in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word of the Lord on several occasions directs us to the delivering nature of His power.

a. God's Word to Moses

'I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt' Acts 7.34.

b. The testimony of the Psalmist

'The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower' Psalm 18.2.

c. The prophecy of Christ's ministry

'And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob' Romans 11.26.

d. The power of Christ's ministry

'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us' 2 Corinthians 1.10.

e. The purpose of Christ's ministry

'Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father' Galatians 1.4.

The Gospel of Mark

'And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen' 2 Timothy 4.18.

Jesus' healing

'And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.

'And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him' Mark 29-34.

It was:

- Immediate. Jesus heard of the need, had compassion on the need, and attended to the need;
- Fruitful. Jesus healed enabling service;
- Diverse. Jesus was like a magnet attracting the needy from all parts of the town with various needs.

So in the Gospel. Jesus forgives and lifts up the spiritually sick sinner to serve Him. Jesus does not turn any away that come to Him, The 'Shiloh Magnet' is the cross.

'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' John 12.32.

Notice that the drawing to Christ comes after the lifting up. It is when we view Christ as our personal Saviour that we are drawn to Him.

Jesus – Casting In and Casting Out

‘Draw me, we will run after thee’ Song of Solomon 1.4.

The cross will never attract us until we admire the Person of the cross.

All must hear the Gospel: all the city gathered (*Mark 1.33*). Jesus gave a picture of the power of salvation. There was a diversity among the sick and possessed, but all were healed who trusted in Him.

Conclusion

Faith in the Lord Jesus is strengthened as we magnify His name and work in our minds. Let us magnify the Name of the Lord together.

He casts in the pure Gospel of God; He casts out the power and disease of sin within us. He heals us from the sickness of our sin.

8. JESUS – HIS PRAYING, PREACHING AND PRACTICE

Mark 1.35-45

As we consider this passage of Scripture we can see three aspects to the testimony of our Lord: His praying, preaching and practice. He prayed, He preached, and He practised what He preached.

Prayer

‘And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee’ Mark 1.35-37.

- It shows Jesus was assuredly made a man and in this state prayer gave Him communion with His Father.
- It shows that communion with His Father in Heaven was an exercise He valued above all else.
- It shows us that in His state as a man, albeit perfect, Jesus was obedient and dependent upon His Father.
- It shows to us that the Lord understood the need of prayer for guidance.
- Prayer was of the greatest comfort here on Earth for the Lord.
- It teaches us to place the highest value on prayer.
- This event also shows us that when we pray intrusion and distraction is not far away, even from well-meant sources.
- Jesus teaches us that prayer is a source of strength, stability, assurance, and wisdom.
- Jesus taught us here the need, when possible, to be alone with the

The Gospel of Mark

Lord our heavenly Father. In this present world of instant communication to find a solitary place is becoming increasingly difficult. Finding a solitary place is a blessing. It shows respect, commitment, earnestness, faith, love, and dependence.

*‘But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly’
Matthew 6.6.*

In the example of the Lord we find the significance of prayer as a foundation for His works.

Preaching

‘And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils’ Mark 1.38-39.

Here we are reminded of the importance that the Lord Jesus placed upon preaching the Word of God. It is a sad decline in the churches when respect is lost for the preaching of the Word of God. The Puritan Thomas Goodwin said: ‘The preaching of the Word is the principal way Christ gathers His Church.’

‘My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass’ Deuteronomy 32.2.

‘For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it’ Isaiah 55.10-11.

Jesus – His Praying, Preaching and Practice

‘And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God’ Luke 4.4.

The Trinity is engaged in employing the preaching of the Word. God the Father appointed it, God the Son prayed for it, and God the Holy Spirit accompanies it with blessing. God has chosen to take weak, earthly vessels like preachers and use them to preach His Word for His glory.

‘We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us’ 2 Corinthians 4.7.

Adam and Eve listened to Satan and fell in the Garden of Eden. God, in confounding Satan, has chosen to bring the blessing of the Gospel through the hearing of the ear.

‘How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God’ Romans 10.14-17.

God chose preaching as a means of blessing that through it people could better understand the Word of God. A good example of this is the Apostle Philip and the eunuch.

‘And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him’ Acts 8.30-31.

After Christ ascended He gave gifts unto men (*Ephesians 4.8*).

The Gospel of Mark

Preaching the Gospel and expounding the Word is a gift. It is only as the Holy Spirit attends the Word that there can be spiritual blessing. Preaching is the most common means of bringing conversion and the building up of believers.

Mark Dever, Senior Pastor of Capitol Hill Church, New York, makes this helpful comment about preaching:

‘Plants won’t grow if they’re not fed, and neither will a church. But what should a church eat to grow? God’s Word is the source of all life and health. It’s what feeds, develops, and preserves a church’s understanding of the Gospel itself. Fundamentally, this means that both pastors and congregations must be committed to expositional preaching. Expositional preaching is the kind of preaching that, quite simply, exposes God’s Word. It takes a particular passage of Scripture, explains that passage, and then applies the meaning of the passage to the life of the congregation. It’s the kind of preaching most geared to get at what God says to His people, as well as to those who are not His people. A commitment to expositional preaching is a commitment to hear God’s Word. Because of this, a commitment to expositional preaching is an essential mark of a healthy church. In fact, expositional preaching is the starting point for all the other marks of a healthy church. Why? Because only through expositional preaching will a congregation hear God’s Word clearly taught every week. And a congregation will only begin to image God – whether in its evangelism, discipleship, leadership, or anything else – as it listens to God’s Word.’

Pastors are under-shepherds ministering under the Lordship of the Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ to the Church. They are called to follow Christ’s example – His teaching, His commitment to preaching, and to serve faithfully. He came forth from Heaven, from the throne of God, to preach the Gospel of God.

Jesus – His Praying, Preaching and Practice

Ray Steadman said,

‘Expository sermons are those which derive their content from Scripture itself. They borrow their structure and thrust from a specific passage. They make the same point that the passage makes, and apply that point with directness and urgency to contemporary life. What is essential therefore in preaching is, first of all, content! It is what Paul calls “*the unsearchable riches of Christ.*” Paul calls himself and other first century preachers: “*stewards of the mysteries of God*” (1 Corinthians. 4.1). He sees himself as entrusted with a fabulous deposit of truth which he is responsible to dispense to others.

“*For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*” (1 Corinthians 9.16). It ought to be the supreme business of a preacher to discharge that responsibility with utter faithfulness. Paul adds: “*It is required of a steward that one be found faithful.*” So he says, in another place, he sought always “*to declare the whole counsel of God.*”

Getting back to the example of the Lord Jesus, preaching was central to His anointed ministry here on Earth.

‘*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised*’ Luke 4.18.

It was a command from His heavenly Father Who sent Him.

‘*And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent*’ Luke 4.43.

When He chose His disciples He sent them forth to preach.

‘*And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach*’ Mark 3.14.

The Gospel of Mark

The final words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples commanded them to preach the Gospel.

‘And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature’ Mark 16.15.

Practice

‘And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed. And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter’ Mark 1.40-45.

The Lord Jesus practised what He preached. There is one word that describes something of the pure heart of the Lord in His practice – compassion. Christ’s example shows us the need for compassion in pastoral ministry and church ministry.

What is the meaning of the word ‘compassion’ in Scripture? It is to be moved inwardly with all the mind, heart, and affections. It is an exercise of the soul, an inner being experience. It means to yearn inwardly with mercy, affection, empathy, and pity. The phrase ‘moved with compassion’ means to be moved in the inner organs. A modern similar expression is when we say ‘from the bottom of my heart’.

Biblical compassion is sympathy inextricably linked with a sincere desire to help. Here is one of the vital keys to the true meaning of compassion. Like love, it is a working fruit.

Jesus – His Praying, Preaching and Practice

How may we develop a compassionate heart? Consider the compassion of Christ. We must view His compassion first as a characteristic of the Triune God. It was perfectly manifest in the testimony of Jesus Christ as a Man. We have the revelation in God's Word that compassion is of the divine essence of God. God is holy, God is love, and God is compassionate by nature.

'And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy' Exodus 33.19.

'But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth' Psalm 86.15.

- It is a characteristic of God's sovereign grace.

'For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion' Romans 9.15.

- Jesus showing compassion revealed the heart of God the Father.

'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him' John 1.18.

- Jesus has compassion for sinners.

'When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' Mark 2.17.

Christ talked with sinners – He converted sinners! Christ reached out in compassion to all stratus of society. There are two occasions on which we read of Jesus specifically standing still with compassion to save.

The Gospel of Mark

1. Zacchaeus

'And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house' Luke 19.5.

2. Bartimaeus

'And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee' Mark 10.49.

- He has compassion for the scattered, the sheep without a shepherd. Christ yearned after the souls of men and the building up of believers.
- He has compassion for the seekers. Knowing all things He understood the pull of the world.
- He has compassion for the sick and the needy. He healed them, fed them, and preached to them Gospel in word and action.
- He has compassion even for those who reject Him.

'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!' Luke 13.34.

- He has compassion on the bereaved.

'Jesus wept' John 11.35.

Here in Mark's account there is clear evidence of Jesus showing compassion, practising what he preached. He met a diseased leper in this city who was banished from society, disfigured and totally covered in leprosy in its final stages, close to death. This man saw Jesus and fell on his face in humility before the Lord in faith. He implored Him, which means he asked diligently in a manner that sought and looked for a definite answer.

Jesus – His Praying, Preaching and Practice

Here we see the man's faith He sincerely believed the Lord could heal him completely. But was the Lord willing? The man required a definite answer by faith. Jesus answered the cry of faith in a definite manner: *'I will; be thou clean'* (Mark 1.41). Once again we can see the definite and whole manner of the healing. Once again we can see the wonder of Christ's care. Remember here that Mark records this event as Christ being 'moved with compassion'.

The leprosy this man had was the worst type and in Bible times it was contagious. The leper had to carry a bell and to continually shout, 'Unclean! Unclean!' Everybody kept their distance from such a man, an outcast in society, apart from Jesus Who touched the untouchable and loved the unlovable.

This miracle, that was a result of a needy man's faith in the Person of Jesus Christ, is a picture of salvation. The condition – full of leprosy – is a reminder of the truth of total depravity. Our whole being is affected by sin. His faith in Jesus alone, his humility, and his belief remind us of our approach to God. His great question is one the seeker asks: would the Lord be willing to heal me?

Here is a perfect picture of God's sovereignty shining in salvation. God is always willing to save a person that comes in repentance and faith to Jesus. Repentance and faith are the evidence of God's work of grace already in exercise. Thus God's willingness to save through Jesus Christ harmonises perfectly with His electing grace.

Jesus commands the man not to publicise his healing but go to the High Priest and have the healing verified. This was in accordance with the ceremonial law for the healing of a leper. This meant that the High Priest would himself have to honestly verify a miracle of Jesus. From this we can learn, spiritually, that when we are converted the first person to speak to is the Pastor. He is responsible before the Lord to verify as far as he can the work of grace, and recommend to the church.

The Gospel of Mark

Secondly, here we understand that Jesus did not want publicity that encouraged the wrong type of following. He understood that the people wrongly excited would seek to make Him a king for material and political ends. He also understood the way in which such a movement can grow in emotion, which then embraces various motives. Jesus knew that too much publicity about the miracles would deflect the people's attention from the Word. There would be divided motives in seeking Him. He knew not all coming to Him for healing cared for their souls.

As it happened the report of the healing power of Jesus went abroad. The effect was that great multitudes came together to Jesus to hear the Word of the Lord and to be healed. You will notice how a multitude came to hear the Word of the Lord. Now great multitudes came both to hear and to be healed, multitudes with mixed motives and needs. This was just the type of response that Jesus knew would happen if the publicity became great. Some were concerned for their souls, some concerned for their bodies.

In the context of His great purpose to preach was the need of thousands of sick people. Such a situation resulted in the Lord resorting to much prayer in a solitary place in the wilderness. From this we learn how an increase in popularity and numbers should lead a pastor to more prayer, not pride.

9. HELPING ONE ANOTHER GOD'S WAY

Mark 2.1-12

This message is centred upon the blessing of helping people together inspired by faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. We have an example of this ministry in the account of these four men who, united together, made a special effort to bring their friend to Jesus.

A manuscript written by Isobel Kuhn was found some while ago in a cellar of the Missionary Headquarters of the *Overseas Ministries Fellowship* which was entitled 'The Second Mile'. It was published and became a real encouragement to those in Christian service. In her manuscript she had recorded the testimony of those people who had gone the second mile in helping her in life. Would my name and your's appear in a person's second mile book as a person who goes beyond the normal course of duty to help others?

'And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.'
Matthew 5.41.

This is exactly what these four men were prepared to do: to make the extra effort to bring a man to Jesus, to go the second mile. This message is practical in nature and is going to draw key principles for Christ-centred care.

Willing to care

'And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four' Mark 2.1-3.

The Gospel of Mark

This is the first step in the ministry of care. This readiness to help comes from a heart of love first and foremost to God in Christ.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' Matthew 22.37-39.

We can see this commandment in evidence in the testimony of the Stephanas family.

'Let all your things be done with love. I beseech you, brethren, you know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints' 1 Corinthians 16.14-15.

This is one of the first fruits of love showing itself in a committed willingness to care. The word 'addicted' has the meaning of being devoted to care, as an appointment of the Lord. However sometimes we feel guilty because we do not have a willingness to help. We may help someone but not willingly. We may know it is our duty and our responsibility, but we do it unwillingly in a wrong spirit. In this type of thinking we get downhearted and feel miserable and guilty about our attitude, so it is like being on what is known as a 'treadmill' of care.

It is sometimes the case that the problem actually lies within us. The problem can be a lack of love within in our soul. We must ask ourselves the question first: how is my relationship with the Lord? Because our respect, understanding and love for the Lord affects our love for others.

When the Apostle Paul wrote his two letters to the Church at Thessalonica he clearly linked their relationship to God in Christ by faith to their labour of love.

'Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our

Helping One Another God's Way

God and Father' 1 Thessalonians 1.3.

'We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other' 2 Thessalonians 1.3.

A willingness to love and to care was a fruit of their relationship with God in Christ. When we grasp this concept of care as a necessary fruit of our relationship with God in Christ, then care takes on a positive and worthwhile meaning and purpose: the Father is watching.

You may not always feel love for the person you are caring for, especially if they are being ungrateful or awkward! Nevertheless for Christ's sake you still willingly care for that person with actions of love. We need a Christ-centred willingness to love and to care in our lives.

Willing to give of their time

Now we are not told how much time these four men gave in their care for this paralytic man or how far they carried the man. We are not told the time of day, but what we do know is that these four men were willing to give of their time to help the man.

There was also a sense of urgency in their actions. They were not casual in their care but committed. Now was the time to help, not tomorrow, but today. There is a saying which goes like this: 'If you want something done, find a busy person.' The reason behind this is that, generally, busy people hate wasting time. They schedule their day to redeem the time. In so doing they are able to accomplish so much more.

A word here to young people who are Christian believers. It is a worthwhile exercise for you to evaluate the time spent on Facebook, tweeting, surfing the net, texting, on the play station, watching television etc. How much of your time spent in this way is serving the Lord? If this is the way you need to communicate, then be like the

The Gospel of Mark

Church members at Thessalonica. Addict or devote yourself to care in a new way, to communicate the Gospel with your friends through this means rather than wasting your time on trivia. But remember the modern methods are not as meaningful or as personal as one-to-one contact that shows you are willing to give of your time and effort to share the Gospel and care for a person in need.

The question is, how are we using our time, especially our spare time? Here we are reminded that some of our personal time needs to be allotted to helping one another.

It is interesting to notice the testimony of Job when he was one of the richest men in the east. He was a very successful businessman and undoubtedly extremely busy. At the same time he was respected as an elder in town and as a guide to the needy. He was willing to give of his time.

'I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame.' Job 29.15.

Willing to take action

We spread the Gospel of God by preaching it in word and deed, demonstrating our wholehearted belief in it by our actions as well as our words. This is faith put into action.

'What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?' James 2.14-16.

It would have been easy for these four men to just say a kind word to their friend and leave him lying in his room. But it was time for action; Jesus was in town and He and He alone could help. In terms of evangelistic care, it is always time for action. Our Saviour is ever ready and ever willing to receive repenting, helpless sinners to Himself.

Helping One Another God's Way

Willing to overcome obstacles

'And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay' v4

Here we come to a very important principle taught in this account. Whenever we set out to help another person it is likely we will hit certain obstacles. This is especially the case in Christian care when our objective and desire is to help not only practically but spiritually, the basic principle of all Christian care. When we are concerned to help both practically and spiritually we are going to come into conflict with Satan.

The men were faced with a huge obstacle. There was no way into the house; the way to Jesus was blocked, there were multitudes listening to Jesus. There in the front of the crowd, where the man needed to be, were the important religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees. This reminds us of the battle we face in leading people to Jesus. Satan will put all sorts of obstacles in the way of our progress, including false teachers who conceal rather than reveal the real Jesus. They preach another Jesus!

Satan's ambition was to stop the man from getting to Jesus. If he could discourage the men to give up, if he could persuade the men in their minds to take the man back home, if he could put off the helpers, then he would have succeeded. It was much easier to give up and go home. This is what Satan wants us to do. He wants us to give up, he doesn't want us to bring people to Jesus.

But we can learn from these men who were innovative, courageous, determined, and focused. Their mission was to get this man to Jesus whatever the cost, whatever the obstacles. Here we are reminded of the need for persistence, adaptability, commitment and the cost in a mission.

The Gospel of Mark

Here is a practical illustration. When Jesse Owens, the famous Olympic runner, was a young boy his trainer told him that if he wanted to succeed he needed to build a ladder to get to the top. The first rung was determination, the second dedication, the third discipline and the fourth was attitude. With these four principles Jesse Owens went on to win four gold medals in the Olympics.

A Christian helper is involved in a far more important race than an Olympic event; it is a race which Paul describes as pressing ‘*toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*’ (Philippians 3.14). In this race Christian care for one another is involved. Practically speaking it does include determination, dedication, discipline and the right attitude of love in service.

*Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem’
Luke 9.51.*

What was it that really inspired these helpers? What was it that made them so determined and dedicated to get the man to Jesus? It was their absolute and solid belief that Jesus was the answer to this man’s need, in partnership with their loving care for their friend. Here are the two important principles for Christian care: belief in Jesus and love for those in need. If we have these two principles deeply rooted within us it will inspire and drive us. Our care needs to be Christ-centred.

Willing to do something unusual for the Lord

There are times when God calls us to come out of our comfort zone to serve Him. In other words, to do something which requires extra effort and commitment in our care. So, for example, our Lord calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who spitefully use us. This is doing something unusual for the Lord.

Then He also calls us to go the extra mile in conversation, fellowship and care of those in need. He calls us to go alongside and talk to

Helping One Another God's Way

a person who is despised and rejected, like He did to the woman of Samaria.

He calls us to wash one another's feet: in other words, to serve others in a humble manner. Sometimes He calls you in Christ-centred care to drop everything to attend to someone in a crisis. Your schedule is changed, but the Lord is calling you. He has entrusted you to care for a person that has a need and towards whom He has a saving purpose. Others may look on and say to you, 'Is this not a bit over the top?' in the same way as many would have probably criticised these men in their care for their friend. Nevertheless, I repeat, there are times when God calls us to come out of our comfort zone to serve Him, to do something which requires extra effort and commitment in our care.

Willing to work together as a team

Here again is a very important principle. A church is a body of people who should work together as a team in Christian care. We each have different gifts which God has given us. Each one of us has something to contribute in some way to helping those in need. These gifts are to be exercised, they are to be used, but used in partnership with the gifts of others. The Church should be the finest example of teamwork. The motto is, 'Unto the Lord'.

The weight of the paralytic man was equally balanced between the men so each man shared the responsibility. So in a team each person takes their responsibility and great progress is made. When obstacles arose no doubt they discussed the problem together. They stuck together, they worked together, and they were blessed together as they saw their friend healed by Jesus.

Great progress is made when each person bears their own burden and people work together as a team. A good example of this is the re-building of the walls of Jerusalem led by Nehemiah. All the people worked together:

'So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto

The Gospel of Mark

the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work' Nehemiah 4.6.

As with the people and Nehemiah, the Church works together at prayer: *'Our God shall fight for us' (Nehemiah 4.20).*

An illustration from Creation helps us as well. Geese fly in formation. The geese in front provide the air current to help the ones behind, and as they fly across the country they take it in turns to fly at the hardest place, at the front. They continually make a noise to each other to encourage one another, and good progress is made as they fly together.

Willing to lead by faith to the right Person

Here we find yet another vitally important principle. These men carried their friend to Jesus in faith. It was faith in Jesus which strengthened them amidst difficulty. Their faith in Jesus had the fruit of loving care for their friend. They brought their friend in the right way to Jesus. They had a caring concern and compassion for their friend and they came by faith in Jesus and in dependence upon Him and Him alone.

Remember there is a right way and a wrong way to bring a person to Jesus, either in a compassionate, caring way, or with a condemning attitude. We see this latter point illustrated by the religious leaders who dragged the woman caught in adultery to Jesus (see *John 8.2-4*).

Willing to work in the most important ministry on Earth

There is no greater privilege or work in this world than leading people to Jesus. Here is the most worthwhile work in all the world. It is the work that God honours and is delighted in most of all, and the work which will be greatly rewarded in Heaven.

'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever' Daniel 12.3.

Helping One Another God's Way

The greatest objective, mission, and desire in all Christian service is to bring people to the Light, to the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

'When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion' Mark 2.5-12.

The miracles Jesus did here on Earth point to the greater power that He has to forgive us our sin. The paralytic man was physically and spiritually sick. He had two great needs, one bodily and one spiritually. Jesus tells us that his greatest need was spiritual. He needed the forgiveness of his sins; he needed to be made right with God. Whatever his bodily ailments may be, his greatest need was spiritual. He needed a right relationship with God through the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The greatest help and need is not for time but for eternity. This is part of what Jesus was teaching in this remarkable event. It was amazing that Jesus could heal bodily, but the greatest miracle was the His power to forgive sins. This power remains the same and it is the inspiration for Christian ministry and care.

10. THE CALL OF CHRIST TO THE NEW WAY

Mark 2.13-22

Prior to the event recorded in these verses, Jesus had healed both a leper and a paralytic man. In these miracles He had shown that He had come to address both the physical and spiritual needs of man. Both these events had caused fear, wonder and praise among those who observed the miracles.

Strange things had indeed happened. Jesus had reached out to a socially untouchable leper and healed him. Later a helpless paralytic man had been let down through the roof to enable access to Jesus. Tied to a mattress bed he had been lowered to the feet of Jesus and he had left walking! He had experienced the wonder-working power of Jesus. This miracle specifically demonstrated the power of Jesus over the whole being of a person. He gave the paralytic man the ability to walk, but before that, in an even greater miracle, He had granted the forgiveness of the man's sins. What a difference Jesus made to these people's lives!

We will now consider this next passage under four headings.

The call

‘And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him’ Mark 2.14.

Levi would have been aware of Jesus. He would no doubt have heard about the miracles being wrought by Him. He would have heard about this remarkable Teacher who taught with authority and conviction (see *Mark 1.22*). However, Levi would have observed at a distance. He was a tax gatherer working for the Roman authori-

The Gospel of Mark

ties under the jurisdiction of Herod. Society in general hated men like Levi, for tax gatherers had a reputation for greed and corruption, growing rich at the expense of others.

They had to work to targets previously agreed with the Roman authorities. However, anything they claimed above the target for their zone they could keep for themselves as a bonus. Only the tax collector knew the overall target he had to achieve for his regional zone.

In addition, legally they were also obliged to keep a record of people's tax payments. Anyone not paying tax, or refusing to pay the amount charged, must be reported to the Roman authorities. Such people would then be apprehended by the authorities. In this the tax collectors were considered as traitors, parasites, and unworthy of recognition by important people in society. Directly anyone took on the office of tax collector they were excommunicated from the synagogue. They were then treated as an outcast and the disgrace extended to the person's family.

So Levi was unlikely to have been expecting any special attention from Jesus. He was sitting at the tax office. This was a customs booth outside the city of Capernaum. Levi had a high-earning, lucrative post and he was going about his daily business of making money. It was just like any other day for Levi.

We have no evidence that he was actively seeking Jesus. Levi was not among the crowds following Jesus – he was at the office making money. This reminds us that the Lord touches people's lives unexpectedly at times. Jesus, Who has come to seek and to save those who are lost, made the first move with Levi. Jesus spoke to him as the Lord directly and personally as He walked by.

The call of Jesus is without partiality. Levi would not have been top of anyone's list for the special call of Jesus, but his call demonstrates the amazing grace of God in reaching out to the unworthy and the despised. God's grace can touch lives so-called 'untouchables'.

The Call of Christ to the New Way

Notice here how the call of Jesus is life-transforming. The power of the call was such that Levi left all, rose up and followed Jesus. From now on his whole life was to be lived unto his Lord. In Levi's case this meant giving up his job and lucrative income to serve the Lord in full-time ministry. He was chosen as one of the twelve apostles and became known as Matthew. Levi's call meant giving up all his worldly ambitions to follow Christ. There was to be no turning back.

Only a small number of the Church of Jesus Christ are called specifically like Levi to leave secular employment into full-time Christian ministry. However, every Christian is called to serve the Lord through every aspect of their lives so, in that sense, every Christian is full-time.

'For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself'
Romans 14.7.

There is a principle in this call of Levi which is true for every true Christian: to follow Jesus wherever He leads, as He is the Lord.

When Jesus said to Levi, *'Follow me'*, it was not only life-transforming but life-embracing. It was not a temporary contract. These words, *'Follow me'*, were applied so powerfully to Levi he would remember them time and time again as he faced decisions. They became the guiding principle of his life. *'Follow me'*! His right walk and fruitfulness and equipping was dependent upon his following the Lord.

The effect of the call

'And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him' Mark 2.15.

Levi had responded to the call willingly and wholeheartedly and now wanted to show his love for Jesus. So he arranged a great feast at which the chief guest was Jesus. Levi made a public statement: Jesus is now the Lord of my life. He is the chief guest in my home. The priorities of life had changed.

The Gospel of Mark

Levi put his marker down at the beginning of his Christian life. Jesus was now the centre of his life. He unashamedly identified himself with Jesus as His Saviour and Lord. Levi made a public witness and gave hospitality to his work colleagues and friends. Notice how soon he had a new burden for his work colleagues. He was concerned for them to meet Jesus. He was also concerned to provide hospitality for those who were willing to follow Jesus.

The reason for the call

'And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?' Mark 2.16.

I expect Levi had given great feasts before, but now a change has taken place. The focus of the feast is no longer motivated by money and greed but by grace. He had experienced undeserved favour from God in a personal way. Jesus is therefore the chief guest and the centre of this great feast as the perfect example of grace.

Remember, Jesus would talk to anyone. He is ready to receive any who want to follow Him. But for the self-righteous leaders who observed what was happening the actions of Jesus was nothing short of scandalous. Here was Jesus willingly accepting an invitation to be guest of honour at a feast attended by sinners, those who had despised the law, and led ungodly lives! In the culture of that time being invited to a meal symbolised fellowship and acceptance. Here were people who were unworthy, being given unmerited favour by Jesus. The unworthy are graced by Christ's presence.

But for the scribes and Pharisees separation from sinners was part of their works for salvation. In truth this actually symbolised their self-righteousness. True separation for a Christian means to be in the world but not of the world. The separation of a Christian in the world has more to do with difference than distance. To have a Christian

The Call of Christ to the New Way

identity in the world, by God's grace, is to be the salt and the light in the world.

But the Scribes and Pharisees complained. They had a totally different understanding, and asked: 'Why do you eat with tax collectors and sinners? We keep ourselves to ourselves. We keep a distance from such people!'

'When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' Mark 2.17.

The righteous spoken of here are those who think they are so good they do not need forgiveness. It is not our sin that keeps us from coming to Jesus, but more often our stubborn pride or self-righteousness that refuses to acknowledge our need before Him. 'I have come to call sinners to repentance. Sinners are the first priority of Jesus. I have come to call the Levis of this world to repentance.'

What does it mean to be called to repentance? It means to be convicted of your lost and sinful condition before God and your need of a Saviour. It means to turn around in your thinking and actions from serving sin to serving God, from loving sin and hating God to hating sin and loving God. One commentator states:

'True repentance hates the sin, and not merely the penalty; and it hates the sin most of all because it has discovered and felt God's love.'

'But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' Romans 5.8.

Notice also the blessed fruit of Levi's conversion: he followed Him. Jesus says, *'Follow me'*, but where to? Where we have come from is not important: where we are going to is eternally important. It is vital to get to the right destination.

There was a couple who had a new car with satellite navigation. They

The Gospel of Mark

were very proud of this. They received an invitation to a wedding with a map included to find the correct destination. In their pride they said, 'We don't need the map – we have the satellite navigator to guide us.' As they left they put in the name of the town into the satellite navigator very quickly without checking. After travelling for a couple of hours they arrived at their destination, but they could not find the church in the street they had been guided to. It turned out they had travelled to a town with the same name in a different county to the one where the wedding was being held and so missed the service.

If we follow Jesus we will get to the right destination. Jesus will lead us to exactly the right place at exactly the right time.

The new nature of the call

'And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles' Mark 2.18-22.

Here the Lord is responding to a potentially divisive statement made to Him by the complaining Pharisees. First they complained about His disciples, because they were seeking to spread discontent in the camp. Jesus Himself answered their accusations, knowing the attack was really aimed at Him. Then the Pharisees move on to a different group of disciples. They disliked the disciples of John as much

The Call of Christ to the New Way

as they despised the disciples of Jesus. Nevertheless they used them in an attempt to drive a wedge between John and Jesus.

Jesus pointed out that the nature of the fasting and prayers of John's disciples at this time had to do with fact that John had been taken from them. They were undoubtedly mourning this fact. Later these disciples of John would join with the disciples of Jesus and follow the Lord in the new way.

Here Jesus, as the Bridegroom, is with His disciples and it is a time of enriching, teaching, and joy. However there will come a time of fasting in the days when the Lord will be taken away in death at Calvary. We know then how the disciples mourned and wept in those particular days, but then the resurrection of Jesus and the day of Pentecost confirming the new way in Christ brought joy.

So for us when we are not experiencing the presence of the Lord in our lives. Then it is a time of leanness in the soul and we mourn and pray for the Lord to appear. As the hymnwriter said:

*Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?*

William Cowper, 1731-1800

But when the Lord is gracing us with His Word and enabling us, we rejoice in His favour towards us. There is a time to mourn and a time to be joyful; there is time to weep and a time to sing.

Then Jesus relates a parable to teach that the old and the new way cannot be mixed together. The new way is to be about living in a transformed relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in a Covenant of Grace. The old way is one of following a Covenant of Works under the Law. For the Pharisees it was also more about following their own added traditions which had developed. However, to attach the new to the old would make a tear – they would not match the old, they are incompatible.

The Gospel of Mark

To put new wine in old wineskins means both will be spoiled. The old wineskins will break and the new wine will be spilled all over the floor. New wine must be put in new wineskins so both are preserved. The way of grace and the way of works, or legalism, cannot be mixed together. The new wine in Christ is better. This is taught very clearly in *Hebrews* where a better way and a better covenant are referred to.

The New Testament way is the new way in Christ to which the Old Testament looked by faith, for example, as Abraham did (*John 8.56*). It is to have a living relationship with Him. His call is a call to discipleship – relationship – a new life in Him, following Him that He will make you, equip you, enable you, and fill you.

Legalism and grace do not mix together – they are incompatible. The new wine of grace will be wasted as it spills out of the broken old wine skins of legalism.

In the New Testament Church so called Judaizers were constantly attempting to do what Jesus warns against. 'It cannot be possible,' they said, 'to be saved by grace alone in Christ alone. No: to be sure of salvation you must be circumcised, and you must continue with the sacrifices and special days.' There was a constant battle to mix the old with the new, set against the Pharisees' teaching that real religion meant fear and fasting. The new way in Christ is one of faith and freedom!

11. THE LORD'S DAY

Mark 2.23-3.6

Introduction

I will commence by laying down some biblical principles regarding the Sabbath day. The key guide to the interpretation of these verses and approach to the Sabbath day today is in verses 27-28:

'And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath' Mark 2.27-28.

As New Testament Christians we follow the example and teaching of our Lord. A Christian is someone who worships Jesus Christ as Saviour and follows Him as the Lord of their life, knowing He is faithful, true, just, understanding, almighty, compassionate and wise in all His ways.

We know that the Lord came to fulfil the Law perfectly and therefore the Sabbath was kept holy for He is holy. The Lord understood fully what it meant to keep the Sabbath day holy according to God's commandment, *'Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy' (Exodus 20.8).*

Looking at the example of the Lord, we know He worshipped in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, He read the Scriptures in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and that He preached on the Sabbath day. In this portion of Scripture in *Mark 2* we also know that our Lord took a walk with His hungry disciples through corn fields, allowing them to pick grain on the Sabbath day.

We know too from the verses in *Mark 3* that our Lord did acts of mercy on the Sabbath day. In that passage we are told He healed the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day. On another occasion we know He healed a man, telling him to take up his bed and walk,

The Gospel of Mark

again on the Sabbath day (*John 5.8-9*). On another Sabbath day we read of Jesus making clay to anoint a blind man's eyes to heal him (*John 9.6-7, 16*).

Our Lord taught here a vital principle: that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. In Scripture we are told that the Sabbath is, in fact, first of all a Creation ordinance. The Lord rested on the seventh day of the first week of Creation, setting a weekly pattern for man. Our Creator God knows that we, as His creation, need one day in seven as a day set apart, a different day. It was at the outset a gift from God for our spiritual blessing, and mental and physical restoration.

But in Jesus day the Pharisees developed a terrifyingly burdensome list of 'dos' and 'don'ts' for the Sabbath. There were actually around a thousand regulations for the Sabbath day that they had added to avoid breaking it. The Sabbath day was day to be dreaded because it meant living only by rules that laid very heavily on the people. But Scripture teaches us that the Lord desires that His people to enjoy the Sabbath day and call it a delight (*Isaiah 58.13*). We need to be very positive about the Sabbath day, now known to us now as the Lord's Day.

Principles

- It is a Creation ordinance.
- It is part of the moral law of God.
- It is a day set apart by God for man.
- It is a gift from God that remains for man's spiritual and physical wellbeing.
- It was kept by the Lord properly: He came to fulfil all the Law perfectly.
- It is a day in which works of mercy, necessity and essential services are to be continued.

- It is a day to call a delight.

Purposes

- It is a day of rest from the work responsibilities of the world.
- It is a day devoted to the worship of God.
- It is a day for spiritual blessing and personal sanctification.
- It is a day to serve the Lord.
- It is a day foreshadowing the eternal rest accomplished through the redemption of Christ in Heaven.

*‘There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief’
Hebrews 4.9-11.*

- It is a day of testimony to demonstrate obedience and loyalty to the Lord.
- It is a day in which part is to be used for rest, fellowship and hospitality.
- It is the Lord's Day that a Christian is to keep as unto the Lord for His glory and his own benefit.

We now move on to consider the keeping of the Sabbath day in a New Testament Christian context, and how it moved from the seventh day of the week as in Old Testament Sabbath to the first day of the week for Christians.

This is an understandable question and one that is often asked. While the apostles used the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day, as a Christ-centred evangelistic opportunity to Jews, the direction of the apostles to the New Testament Church was to keep the Sabbath on the first day of the week. It was called at that time Lord's Day – what we know now also as Sunday. But why on the first day of the week? Why

The Gospel of Mark

not still on the seventh day as with the Jews? Here are some significant pointers:

a. The resurrection of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ on the first day of the week

'The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre' John 20.1.

b. The appearance of Jesus to the assembled disciples on the first day of the week

'Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you' John 20.19.

c. The second appearance of Jesus to the assembled disciples again on the first day of the week

'And after eight days [meaning the first day of the next week] again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you' John 20.26.

This first day of the week became one of the symbols of the Christian faith testifying to hope and life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

d. An account of a worship service including preaching and the Lord's Supper held on the first day of the week

'And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight' Acts 20.7.

e. Instructions given to the Church at Corinth

'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him

The Lord's Day

in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come' 1 Corinthians 16.2.

Here we can safely assume Paul was making reference to the normal weekly gathering together of the church.

f. The Lord's Day referred to

'John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet' Revelation 1.9-10.

The Apostle John had been banished to the Isle of Patmos because of his testimony of Jesus Christ. Here we are considering an apostle filled with the Spirit of God receiving a vision. John had had personal fellowship and communion with Jesus Christ, his Lord and Saviour, while here upon Earth. Now the Lord was revealing Himself and His purposes to John in a vision. The Lord appeared to John on the Lord's Day, resurrection day, the first day of the week, once again signifying His recognition of this day of the week.

From the writings of the early Church Fathers it also becomes apparent that the Lord's Day was the day of the week in which Christians, uniquely in a pagan society, set aside to worship the Lord. The Lord's Day was a serious business for those early New Testament Christians, and in so doing they were truly blessed. It was truly a delight, not a bind. It was truly a special day, not a burdensome one, a day of joy and gladness.

Here the principle of liberty, the freedom to enjoy and use the Sabbath in the right way, is taught by Jesus.

Mark 2.23-28

'And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck

The Gospel of Mark

the ears of corn. And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath'

Here the disciples were doing something allowed in the Mosaic law but on the Sabbath Day.

'When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn' Deuteronomy 23.25.

The Pharisees in their critical spirit were watching out for trouble, spying on Jesus' disciples. They saw them walking along with Jesus, probably cheerfully chatting and enjoying the Sabbath day of rest. The disciples, being hungry, helped themselves to some grain along the wayside, which was perfectly legitimate. Here was an opportunity for the Pharisees, so they jumped out and accused the disciples to Jesus – they were working on the Sabbath day! Plucking the heads of corn was reaping; rubbing it in the hands was threshing; throwing away the husks was winnowing. Notice how severely Jesus rebukes them. 'Get away from your manmade traditions and get back to the Scriptures. You know all these rules off by heart but do not know your Bible. Did not David and his followers go into the house of God when they were hungry, and eat the showbread reserved for the priests but given to them in compassion of their need?'

The twelve loaves laid on a table in the Holy of holies were a symbol

The Lord's Day

of the twelve tribes of Israel. The loaves were called the Bread of Presence, a symbol of the twelve tribes' gratitude to God, dependence upon God, and fellowship with God. David had a need on the Sabbath day. He went to the house of the Lord into His presence and received help. It was an act of necessity. God is the God of providence and of grace and mercy.

David's need was met in God's compassion. Ahimelech the priest gave David loaves of bread reserved for the priests that had been in the holy place. David, who walked with God by faith, worshipped God as not only being holy, but also compassionate. His boldness was not driven by proud rebellion but by an understanding confidence in the God of love and mercy. It was a blessed assurance that God knew his need – he was in the will of the Lord and the law of love ruled.

Jesus is holy and perfect and Lord of all, including the Sabbath, He defended His disciples in their action. He was their Advocate defending them against their accusers. Therefore the Pharisees were wrong to attack the disciples in their own assessment of breaking the Sabbath. How could the Sabbath be a day of delight for the disciples if they had to continue on their walk hungry?

Mark 3.1-6

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees

The Gospel of Mark

went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.'

The second attack by the Pharisees centred on the healing of a sick man on the Sabbath day. Here Jesus teaches it is always the right time to be kind and compassionate whatever the day of the week. Jesus is teaching from the Word of God, perfect truth spoken in love and authority. Alongside Him sat a man with a withered hand, no doubt looking to Jesus for healing. Here was an opportunity for the Lord to show the compassion of God to the needy.

Yet looking on with bitterness and hardness of hearts were the Pharisees. Jesus knew their thoughts. He knew they were just waiting to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath day, to work on the Sabbath day. Here we are faced with a solemn truth: Jesus knew their thoughts.

So he commanded the man with the withered hand to stand alongside Him. Standing next to this poor man, no doubt despised by the Pharisees because of his disability, He asks a question that reveals the wicked state of their hearts. He stood before them representing good, doing good and speaking good things. They stood before Him representing evil and destruction. He is saving life; they are destroying life. Jesus was challenging them to tell Him what was wrong with Him healing on the Sabbath day.

Then, looking around at them all, He commanded the man to stretch out his hand, and his hand was restored. Jesus had come to restore life, to heal. In Him we can call the Sabbath a delight. What Jesus did for this man He can do for us spiritually.

'Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation' Psalm 51.12.

Conclusion

The Pharisees reacted with rage. Jesus was disrupting their plans; He was disturbing their lives, their thinking, their consciences, their traditions and their security.

The Lord's Day

The Sabbath is not about rules and regulations but about worship, service, rest, renewal, and restoration. Our lives are withered by sin and the Lord invites us each Lord's Day to stretch forth ourselves to Him by faith and be healed. He is ready, willing and able to save you. He delights in mercy whatever the day.

Christ has earned the right, by His suffering and sacrifice on the cross at Calvary, to be your Saviour. He is God's way of salvation. The only way you will ever call the Sabbath a day of delight is in Christ, for He is our only hope of being right with God and forgiven. He is our hope of eternal rest in Heaven.

We come into the sanctuary with a withered soul sometimes. What could be better than spiritual restoration? Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for the benefit of man. Man is benefitted as he follows the Lord, respecting the Lord's Day as of great principle and purpose to him.

The historic Christian position is that the Lord's Day in Christ is to be a day set apart for worship, service and rest from the labours of this world. As believers in Christ we long to be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, in common with the testimony of God's people recorded in the New Testament. Our freedom in Christ is actually a willing heart to serve and worship on a day set apart for the Lord. As one commentator says:

'Much of our spiritual prosperity as Christians depends on the way we keep the Lords Day and as a delight.'

12. COMMISSIONED BY CHRIST

Mark 3.7-19

'But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judæa, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumæa, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him. And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him. For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues. And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known' Mark 3.7-12.

Just prior to His commissioning of the twelve apostles the Lord had been exercising an incredible and great ministry of healing to many of the sick. Those with unclean spirits acknowledged Him as the Son of God Who had supreme power over them. But in this healing ministry the Lord had no intention of promoting Himself. Rather the reverse was the case. He charged them not to make Him known in a publicity campaign. During His healing He often enjoined silence, but in His teaching and preaching of the Gospel He invited all. Looking to Calvary He said,

'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' John 12.32.

The Gospel for men's souls, for eternity, must have precedence over the healing of the sick for time.

We now move on to the calling of the apostles.

'And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom

The Gospel of Mark

he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: and Simon he surnamed Peter; and James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphæus, and Thaddæus, and Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house' Mark 3.13-19.

We should notice at the outset of this process that the Lord turns to committed prayer. The importance of prayer is clearly demonstrated in the witness and testimony of our Lord here. He constantly and consistently resorted to private and personal prayer to His Father in Heaven. Before He appointed the apostles we read here:

'He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God' Luke 6.12.

The Son of God, Who lived a perfect life, Who wasted no time or words, took time to pray. His example proves the importance of prayer perfectly and sufficiently. It is God's will that we pray. It is essential for spiritual growth and fellowship with God. God has chosen to build the Church together with prayer. Without it there can be no real blessing on our work for the Lord.

The Lord, the perfect Man, set the example of prayer. He demonstrated its vital importance to our spiritual wellbeing and guidance. Even though as God He knew all things, as the perfect Man the Lord continued all night in prayer, such was His desire to have fellowship with His Father at this crucial time in His ministry. His desire at all times was to fulfil His Father's will perfectly here on Earth, so now here it must be so in the appointment of the apostles.

Commissioned By Christ

The particular lesson we learn here from the Lord, and the pattern He set for us with our finite minds, is the importance of prayer when making crucial decisions and appointments. Here Christ magnified the significance of prayer for guidance in decision making. This is especially important when those decisions relate to the wellbeing of the Church.

Why is prayer so important for us when making decisions?

- Firstly, it means we are submitting our decision-making to mould with the will of God.
- Secondly, we are engaging and identifying our life and situation with God and His Word.
- Thirdly, we are acknowledging our dependence upon God.
- Fourthly, we are following the pathway of wisdom inasmuch as we are walking as God intends us to walk.
- Fifthly, we find that because we pray God guides our decision-making through His Word and providence.
- Sixthly, our spirit is lifted up because the burdens that weigh heavily on the soul are relieved through prayer.

‘Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved’ Psalm 55.22.

The apostles

From the group of disciples following the Lord, twelve are to be called to the office of apostle. A disciple of Jesus was a learner, an adherent, a follower, one having a close relationship with Christ. But an apostle was in addition one sent under the authority of Christ according to God’s sovereign will. An apostle was a man who had been personally acquainted with the Lord Jesus while He was here on Earth.

Each of the apostles had a God-given call with the accompanying confirming signs to the call. They were ordained by Christ, and each

The Gospel of Mark

sent by Christ according to the perfect will of God. The apostles were called by God, sent by God and authorised to serve by God. The authority of the apostle lay in the Sender. They had been commissioned to represent Christ as their Sender. They each had a specific responsibility relating to the establishing of the New Testament Church, having been commissioned personally as an ambassador of Christ.

In this commission the Lord, through them, worked signs and wonders that were all genuine and provable. These witnessing signs were given for the establishing and furtherance of the Gospel. In addition to this witness was their specific and unique call to establish the doctrine of the Church.

*‘Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone’
Ephesians 2.19-22.*

But now we move on to consider who these twelve apostles were. From this we can learn something of the depth and width of God’s power, mercy, and grace. The Lord did not choose only the most intellectually able, the most successful, the most influential. Apart from Paul, chosen later, the men were ‘nobodies’ in society and in the religious hierarchy. Yet they were given an amazing authority to preach, to teach, to heal, to overcome demons, and to heal the sick.

The point for us is that we can take encouragement from the way God can use whom He will. God can equip, anoint, develop and grant blessing in a way which magnifies His power and grace. He can raise up men in the local church and equip them according to His timing to be a real blessing.

We will now see how the Lord was pleased to anoint different men with differing personalities for the work of His kingdom.

Simon Peter

In every list of the apostles, Simon Peter is always mentioned first. The Lord raised up Simon Peter to be a leader who, according to the working of grace, became stable as a rock. That was certainly not the case when he was first called by the Lord! He was anything but stable. He swayed from one position to another: from belief to unbelief, from faith to fear, from strength to weakness, from declaration of loyalty to denial. On the Mount of Transfiguration he moved from saying, 'Let's make three tents', to falling on his face in fear and adoration. He changed from making an open profession of Christ, to even rebuking Christ for speaking of suffering and death. Later on he went from saying, 'Let's go fishing', to 'It is the Lord!', and plunging in the sea to go to Him on the beach. He slipped from making that wonderful statement, 'To whom else can we go?', to denying his Lord.

The Scriptures record these opening years of Peter's ministry to show how God can change a person by grace. There is something refreshingly honest about the account of Peter and his testimony; there is no hypocrisy. The Lord worked in the life of Peter in a wonderful way, confirming his call and using him mightily. He treated Peter so graciously and mercifully following his backsliding, restoring him to communion. So just before His ascension to Heaven He commissioned Simon Peter especially, on the basis of the love of the Lord to him and his love to the Lord being loyal and pure: '*Feed my lambs*', and '*Feed my sheep*' (*John 21.15-16*).

When he came to the end of his life he was truly respected as a solid leader of the Church: Peter, a rock, a man that matured in the ministry and developed as a leader to the honour and glory of God. At the end of his life we know that Peter was martyred, giving his life unto the death. The Lord, while here on Earth, had told him at the outset that the nature of his death would be like this. What is remarkable is that Peter, knowing this certainty, grew in grace, stability, usefulness and faithfulness.

The Gospel of Mark

The Lord loved Peter and Peter loved the Lord and, despite the failures, therein lay the secret of his ministry. Take a look at Peter writing as an old man just prior to his martyrdom and departure to Glory:

'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen' 1 Peter 5.6-11.

See how the attitude of Peter changed from self-confidence to Christ-confidence. The changeable one was transformed into the stable one, all according to the God of all grace.

James and John

These two men were called 'Boanerges' by Jesus, meaning 'sons of thunder', owing to their fiery nature at times.

'And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them' Luke 9.54-56.

What is most remarkable, as we consider these two men prone to speak in their own spirit at times, is how the Lord by His grace sanctified their boldness and energy to develop them into consistent, committed men. John became recognised as the closest of the apostles to Jesus for whom He felt a special spiritual bond. John wrote a Gospel, three Epistles and the *Book of Revelation*.

Commissioned By Christ

Both James and John accompanied the Lord with Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration and to Gethsemane. James was the first of the twelve apostles to wear the martyr's crown

'And he killed James the brother of John with the sword' Acts 12.2.

He was then the first of the apostles to arrive in Heaven, whereas his brother John, dying as an old man in Patmos, was thought to be the last of the apostles to arrive there.

The Lord took two fishermen and gave them by His grace great understanding of Himself and the Truth. Everything in the ministry is down to the God-given character of the called and the equipping of the called.

Andrew

Andrew was the brother of Simon Peter, also a fisherman. He was instrumental in bringing Peter to Jesus. Notice how Andrew was the one introducing his brother to Jesus and yet took second place afterwards. It was Peter, James and John who became the closest of the disciples to Jesus. This reminds us that taking extra responsibility in leadership is not according to age, or a matter of taking your turn. It is according to God's will.

God had a great work for Andrew and he was willing to exercise his gift in the position the God ordained him. It seems he was particularly gifted in bringing people to Jesus, having an assured faith in his Lord.

'The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus' John 12.21-22.

Andrew was willing to be respected and used as recruiter of souls to Jesus, a vital aspect of Gospel ministry.

The Gospel of Mark

Philip

Philip came from Bethsaida, as did Peter and Andrew. After his initial call by the Lord he had no doubt that the One Whom he was serving was indeed the Messiah. His first action of service was to go and get his friend Nathanael and take him to Jesus.

‘Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see’ John 1.45-46.

Again, we see this characteristic of witness motivated by an assured confidence in the Lord. From this we are reminded that effective witness relies upon a personal relationship with the Lord. It requires an ever-increasing adoration, admiration and knowledge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

However, the witness of Philip also reminds us that facing impossible circumstances our faith can take a knock. Jesus asked Philip a question as to how it was going to be possible to buy bread or cakes to feed the multitude. Philip’s reply reveals the overwhelming sense of helplessness at such a task.

‘When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little’ John 6.5-7.

From Philip we learn how important it is not to be content with spiritual ignorance of the Person of Christ. When Jesus was expounding the truth about His relationship with God the Father, he said, *‘Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us’ (John 14.8)*. To this request Philip receives a revealing answer from Jesus:

Commissioned By Christ

*Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?’
John 14.9.*

The answer of the Lord to Philip teaches us how important it is to know Jesus for Who He really is. He has just said, *‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’* He then speaks about the need to know Him personally: *‘I am the revelation of God the Father to this world and to My people.’*

From the experience of Philip here we are taught the vital importance of knowing Jesus in ministry, the vital importance of seeking to know more about Him constantly and not to be content with spiritual ignorance and underestimate Who Jesus really is.

Bartholomew

He is the Nathanael whom Philip brought to Jesus. There is a characteristic in Nathanael in his walk with the Lord which shines out as a precious gem: he is a person in whom there is no guile. In other words he is sincere and without deceit.

Bartholomew was one of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias who met with the resurrected Lord on the beach.

Matthew

He was the man called from a business background, the tax collector who responded to the call of Jesus, *‘Follow me’ (Mark 2.14)*. Matthew was the man who soon laid on a dinner for his friends, with the Lord being the chief guest. From the outset Matthew was out-and-out for the Lord. He teaches us that the nature of the call into the ministry is all-consuming – he left all and followed the Lord. It seems his enthusiasm to collect people’s money was now transformed to enthusiasm to save souls.

The Gospel of Mark

Thomas

Thomas was the apostle who asked the question about where Jesus was going and how can we know the way? It was this question that resulted in the wonderful answer of Jesus being the Way, the Truth, and the Life (*John 14.6*).

But the testimony of Thomas reveals to us the battle between devotion and doubts, even in an apostle. Thomas on occasions demonstrated deep devotion to his Lord, especially at the death of Lazarus.

‘Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him’ John 11.14-16.

When Jesus said He would go back into Judea to go to Lazarus Thomas was sure it would result in His death, yet sadly later, when Jesus did actually come to His death, Thomas fled with other disciples. Then when Jesus appeared to the other disciples while he was absent,

‘The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe’ John 20.25.

Jesus did, in His gracious mercy, reappear for him, thus providing irrefutable evidence of His resurrection. Thomas expressed his sincere devotion again: *‘My Lord and my God’* (*John 20.28*). However, Jesus rebuked Thomas for his lack of faith while at the same time providing for us a promise.

‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed’ John 20.29.

From the testimony of Thomas we know what counts with the Lord is faith and devotion, not demands for evidence and then devotion.

Commissioned By Christ

But Thomas was not rejected because of his doubts, and proved faithful unto death. Historians tell us that he died as a martyr thrust through with a spear rather than deny His Lord.

James the son of Alphaeus

This man is an example of how some servants of the Lord are called to faithful ministry out of the limelight. We do not read much of this apostle, but historians tells us he was eventually martyred. From this brother we learn it takes great grace to serve without being noticed and remain faithful unto death.

Simon the Canaanite, a zealot

Here is an interesting example of sovereign grace and the power of God unto salvation in Jesus Christ. Simon the Zealot, before his conversion, was a rebel against the Roman Empire – an activist. He was a member of an extreme group who did what they could to ferment rebellion among the Jews. Yet now subdued by sovereign grace his life is transformed to be zealous for the Lord and His cause.

It is amazing to note the extraordinary diversity from which the Lord is pleased to call. Never write off a future leader because of their past unconverted lifestyle. Paul was a murderer; James a rebel leader avoiding taxes; and Matthew a corrupt collector of those same taxes.

Judas Iscariot

Judas Iscariot knowingly sold himself to error and the devil in the face of perfect truth. The state of Judas Iscariot is so tragic and solemn it is difficult to put into words. Suffice it to say it is a solemn warning that there will always be, in this fallen world in the professing Church, those whose hearts are not right with God. They are really anti-Christ, yet parade for a time as being for Christ. Christ describes this as the wheat and tares in the same field sometimes covering truth even to their death.

However Judas, when tested by Satan, eventually showed his true

The Gospel of Mark

colours before death and denied the faith as a reprobate betraying the Lord.

The deep, eternal chasm between the selfish heart of Judas and the unselfish heart of Jesus is evident. The total depravity of sin in the corrupt vessel of an unbelieving heart is manifest for all time in Judas Iscariot. The awful truth is that, left to ourselves without grace in our heart, we are no better than Judas. Left to ourselves we all have the potential to be a Judas Iscariot against Christ and His Church. Such solemn truth should make us tremble and run without delay to the Saviour as the Refuge for sinners.

Conclusion

As we consider the apostles chosen by the Lord we cannot fail to be amazed at the leadership of Jesus. The Lord in His leadership was a Man of integrity even to His betrayer Judas, dealing with him courteously. God, in His overruling sovereignty, in His majesty and power, rises above Judas to fulfil His perfect will. God Who knows all things even prophesied that such a terrible event would come to pass – all was under control.

*‘Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus’
Acts 1.16.*

What Satan and Judas meant for evil God, in His perfect wisdom, overturned for good. Even the greatest enemies of the Lord can be used of the Lord to bring about His sovereign purposes.

But moving on from Judas, consider how Jesus welded His disciples together into an influential community. They proved to be a solid foundation for the Church’s future upon which the doctrine of the Church was built. The Lord accomplished this miracle despite the failures and weaknesses, faults and foibles. Consider the majestic wisdom of the Lord in being able to draw together men of different

Commissioned By Christ

backgrounds, different skills, and different temperaments: Peter the optimist; Thomas the pessimist; Simon the zealot; Matthew the tax collector. Jesus drew them with the cords of His tender, never-failing compassion and loved them to the uttermost. Such an example must lead us to the reality of diversity in a church and leadership, but united in Christ and doctrine.

13. MISUNDERSTANDING THE MIND, MIRACLES AND MINISTRY OF THE LORD

Mark 3.20-35

Misunderstanding the mind of the Lord

‘And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself’
Mark 3.20-21.

This event took place at the time when the ministry of Jesus Christ was making a tremendous impact. Thousands of people desired to see Him, hear Him, or to be healed by Him. The world had not witnessed anything like this before. Here was a Man who was making an incredible stir. In that stirring He turned upside-down the false teaching of the religious leaders.

He turned upside-down their false understanding of God’s Law; He turned upside-down the religious leaders’ and society’s harsh view of the needy and the oppressed. He turned the world upside-down with His miracles. He turned the world upside-down with the teaching of the Gospel of God, that unworthy sinners should be saved in Christ. It made people think. It stirred up their minds. He spoke to them with authority. The mind of Jesus Christ was fully set on obeying His Father’s will and on serving others, even to Calvary.

After a while His friends, seeing the following He had, His impact, holiness, zeal and commitment, thought, ‘He has lost His mind. We must take Him away, shut Him away from the world, stop His ministry.’ Of course this was to misunderstand His perfect mind, miracles, and ministry. His commitment, zeal, wisdom, works, and teaching was unique. The problem was not that the Lord Jesus was out of

The Gospel of Mark

His mind or that His mind could not cope; the problem was that His friends could not cope with the Lord Jesus in *their* minds. They could not comprehend His zeal, compassion, commitment, and concern for the needy. So to solve their problem they sought to take Him out of sight and out of mind: 'He is beside Himself!'

There was a similar accusation made against the Apostle Paul in the early Church as he preached the Gospel (see *Acts 26.22-29*). Paul acknowledged that some thought him beside himself in the ministry.

'For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause' 2 Corinthians 5.13.

'These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also' Acts 17.6.

The Gospel and the signs and wonders were causing a tremendous stir among the nations: lives were being changed. The thinking, philosophy, and wisdom of men being turned upside-down by the Gospel. Repentance is turning around, a change of mind, a change of direction, heart, and allegiance. So it can be that, when a person is converted, friends look on that person and come to the conclusion, 'They have lost it, gone religious.' They may mock them, turn against them, or try to persuade against following Christ.

To repent and put our trust in one Saviour Jesus Christ, Who died on the cross at Calvary, is an offence to the world and folly to those who teach there are many ways to God. Do not be surprised if you are considered out of your mind when following Jesus Christ wholeheartedly, when you are called in sacrificial love to follow your Master when humanly speaking it seems impossible. Better to have the mind of Christ, even if the world thinks you have gone out of your mind, than to have the mind of the world and the humanistic respect of the world.

Misunderstanding the Lord

*'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus'
Philippians 2.5.*

'Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin' 1 Peter 4.1.

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

Katie Barclay Wilkinson, 1859-1928

Misunderstanding the miracles of the Lord

'And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end. No man can enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house' Mark 3.22-27.

It is evident that the scribes came to Galilee to cause division and make evil accusations against the Lord. They came with closed minds. They had already made up their minds about the Lord and proudly accused the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, of having Satan dwelling within Him. They stated that His miracles of healing and deliverance were the work of the devil.

From this example we see the danger of prejudiced views without fairly weighing up the evidence. The Scribes came down to impose their thinking on others and turn people against the Lord.

The Gospel of Mark

Jesus responded to them with holy reasoning and logic. How can Satan cast out Satan? Would Satan cast out his own spirits that he has put in a person in the first place? If his kingdom is divided against itself it will crumble: *'If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.'* If its foundations do not support the walls, and the joists do not support the roof, it will fall in on itself. If Satan opposes himself it is impossible for him to stand: he has to support his own to stand.

In the ministry of Jesus Christ He binds and limits Satan and then spoils his evil goods. He takes away the evil spirits out of a person but binds Satan and renders him powerless. All Satan can do is look on while the King of kings and Lord of lords accomplishes His deliverance of souls.

'Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.' Mark 3.28-30.

Now to wilfully and knowingly attribute the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus to that of the devil is fatal. The Lord Jesus defines the sin against the Holy Spirit as that of accusing Him of having an unclean spirit; in other words, attributing the pure work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus as being unclean. It is to wilfully misunderstand, resist, and speak against the work of the Holy Spirit as being evil. It is also to refuse to bow to His inspired Word of God as our rule of life. It is to wilfully attack His Word. It is to continue in this pathway in a determined manner, hardening your heart to such an extent that evil becomes good and good becomes evil. Sadly, this is the state in society today and in false religion that denies Christ and the inspired Word of God.

Here the scribes came down to speak against the Lord, having pre-determined in their minds He was evil. They proudly made statements

Misunderstanding the Lord

against Him to others. Their sin was to look at the Son of God and witness His wonderful works and wilfully attribute them to the devil. In this they blasphemed against the Holy Spirit saying the Lord had an unclean spirit. They said this about the One upon Whom the dove had descended at His baptism to symbolise the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord, knowing these men's hearts were sold to the devil, spoke solemnly in supporting the Holy Spirit.

'Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men' Matthew 12.31.

'...but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation' Mark 3.29.

'And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven' Luke 12.10.

The scribes had no concept whatsoever of the work of the Holy Spirit: their religion was all in the mind. They therefore failed to recognise His work, but added to their sin of ignorance by attributing it to the devil.

This statement of the Lord does at times cause great fear among the Lord's people. There may be a deep concern as to whether or not we may have committed the unpardonable sin. Now we are sinners and do not always use wise judgment or discernment. Sadly, there may have been times when we have inadvertently spoken against a work of God. There is forgiveness for us in these situations as we come in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ.

Please note verse 28: *'Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall*

The Gospel of Mark

blaspheme.' However, verse 29 should alert us to be very wise in making judgments about a work or in judging one another, not be too quick and ready to criticise and condemn, but in the fear of the Lord stand for what is right.

Notice the dialogue among the Jews in *John 10.19-21*.

'There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?'

The sin against Holy Spirit is never forgiven because the person refuses to bow to God's way of forgiveness. It is to refuse to repent of our sin or bow before the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. It is to refuse to heed or to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in His Word. It is to have no concern for the glory and holiness of God and rather speak against it.

When a man has become hardened so that he has made up his mind not to pay attention to the promptings of the Spirit in God's Word and in his conscience, not even to listen to the Spirit's pleading and warning voice, he has placed himself on the road that leads to perdition. If that person continues in that pathway without repentance he has sinned that sin unto death. There can be no forgiveness of sin in Christ Jesus without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit within us. If we deny the need of the pure work of the Holy Spirit of God working in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, this is in reality to treat the Holy Spirit as unclean and discard Him in our minds as surplus. But every true Christian who is eternally secure in Christ wholeheartedly accepts the need of the Holy Spirit, depends upon the Holy Spirit and is grieved when His influence is quenched at times in their heart by their sin.

This is not a statement for the converted, for the regenerate soul; it is for those who reject the Holy Spirit. It is for those who determinedly

Misunderstanding the Lord

say, 'I'm a Christian,' without being converted and refuse to submit to God's way. Such people never cast themselves wholly upon the Lord Jesus Christ but continue in their own religion.

Misunderstanding the miracles of Jesus here was to attribute the power to the devil, not God. Misunderstanding the work of salvation is to deny the necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit within, grieving Him. It is to say, 'We can have a religion without life, we are right with God without conversion. We are wiser than God.' This is to deny Him.

Misunderstanding the ministry of the Lord

'There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother' Mark 3.31-35.

The Lord is told that His mother and younger brothers are outside desiring to see Him. Maybe the multitude thought that He would close the meeting and go out to His mother and brothers. Were they not calling for Him? Should He not respond immediately to His mother's call? The family had probably heard how his friends had gone to take Him away. It may be that the people mentioned in verse 21 may refer to the same as those in verse 31 as the rendering for the word 'friend' in the original is 'those who were from beside Him.' Possibly Mary with her sons also misunderstood the all-consuming nature of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

In terms of family ties, the Lord Jesus always honoured his earthly mother according to God's moral law. But in terms of ministry His natural mother had no authority or claim over Him whatsoever. Mary, as the mother of Jesus, has no special claim over Him or with

The Gospel of Mark

Him, either spiritually or in the Church. Mary is most certainly not the way to the Lord in prayer. That is a type of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit inasmuch as we are saying that the Holy Spirit's intercession in us, and also Christ's in Heaven, is insufficient so that we need an additional, unbiblical intercessor to speak on our behalf.

Mary even now is as a sinner saved by grace is in Heaven with all the other saints that have gone to Glory. Mary is a sinner saved by grace just in the same way any other saved sinner is saved by grace. She herself testified to this in her song when she said, *'My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour'* (Luke 1.47).

At the beginning of His ministry, when Jesus turned the water into wine, Mary had to be taught her place. When she attempted to direct Jesus He answered to the effect that He was not under her authority in ministry. In reply Mary told the servants to do whatever He said to them. She understood perfectly the lesson then.

But here it seems she is making the same type of attempt using family ties to override His ministry. Jesus takes the opportunity to teach the nature of a relationship based on walking with the Lord. A very close family relationship is symbolised in which spiritual ties even supercede natural ties. His mother and brothers are outside, whom He loves and respects as family. However, He enjoys an even closer, eternal relationship with the children of God, a spiritual relationship, and this should be of great encouragement to us. Some of you may not enjoy family ties as others – you are away from your family. But as these people were comforted as Jesus looked on them and said, 'You are My brethren', so the Lord looks down from Heaven even now and says to us His children, 'You are My brethren.'

The heart of the ministry of Jesus Christ is as the Shepherd of His sheep leading, guiding, and securing. In His ministry the Lord views our relationship with Him as being of paramount importance. But note this close spiritual relationship with the Lord is recognised by

Misunderstanding the Lord

Him as being meaningful in the context of obedience. For the Lord obedience to His Word and to His way are absolutely vital to an ongoing relationship with Him.

Hearing the Word of God as an act of worship and then following the teaching of it affirms our love for Jesus. This obedience to the Word is not a servile obedience but an obedience based on a loving relationship with Jesus: *'If ye love me, keep my commandments'* (John 14.15). It is a relationship defined by grace. The grace-favour relationship of God towards us in Christ has the fruit of obedience to His Word. So the work of grace is evidenced in a believer's life by hearing the Word of God and doing it – obedience. The Lord Jesus teaches the work of grace and our service by grace as being inseparable.

'Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear' Hebrews 12.28.

Misunderstanding the ministry of the Lord is to place it on the same level as human relationships. It is to attempt to put a restraint on holy zeal and commitment, understanding it as being 'over the top'.

14. THE BATTLE FOR THE HEART

Mark 4.1-20

Mark 4 commences with reference to a great multitude. Whereas in *Mark 3* the great multitude mainly gathered for healing, here they gathered for teaching. What an incredible witness this is for any time, when a crowd gathers to hear the Word of God. Notice also how the Lord Jesus, while specifically instructing a low profile for His ministry of miracles, when it comes to preaching He encourages people to gather together to hear the Word of God.

On this occasion Jesus availed Himself of a boat to obtain the best position to be heard by all. This meeting is about the Word of God being preached and the boat served as a pulpit for the Lord. What is the significance of having a pulpit from which to preach today? Why do we have a pulpit? A pulpit today does not signify the importance of the preacher – God forbid a preacher should use it as this! A pulpit signifies the authority of the Word of God: we sit under the authority of the Word of God.

Behind the Lord Jesus was the vast expanse of the Sea of Galilee; in front of Him the great multitude. On this occasion He taught in parables. Jesus was teaching through narrative. He was using illustrative language to convey a spiritual truth. A parable has been described as an earthly illustration conveying a heavenly meaning. So here Jesus started where the people were. He used an everyday, common illustration through which a truth could be conveyed. We are surrounded by God-given illustrations, providing a rich source of teaching. Here it was the sower and the seed.

A parable provides a test for the hearers

'Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow' Mark 4.3.

'And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.'

The Gospel of Mark

And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable' Mark 4.9-10.

Those who are seeking God will want to find out the truth contained within the parable. They will not be content with just hearing the story – there must be truth behind it. Others will just listen and treat it simply as a story. Here Jesus calls for attentive hearing, alert hearing. Jesus says, 'Listen!'

Jesus knows the capacity of the human mind, the best way to keep the attention of His congregation, so He uses an illustration they can relate to. Maybe there was actually a sower sowing on the hillside. But the test here was whether the people would listen.

Note the connection between verse 3: 'Listen!' and verse 9: 'Hear!' Jesus not only wished them to listen but also go on to ask questions of the parable. The unbeliever would be content to listen to the story and leave the matter unresolved in their mind. But the seekers were encouraged to think and not rest until they find out the meaning of the parable. The parable would whet the spiritual appetite of the seekers, while at the same time confirm the hardness of those who considered the parable nothing more than a story. This is what Jesus is saying in verses 11-13:

'And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them. And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?'

To those who seek Him is the privilege given to understand the mystery of the Kingdom of God. The word 'mystery' here is used to express a secret which has been hidden behind the parable. But to those outside the Kingdom and unconcerned about the truth, their

The Battle for the Heart

hardness of heart is confirmed. They are not concerned to perceive or understand and turn from their darkness and be saved. The parables confirm their lifeless and sad condition.

Now in this parable the sower refers to Jesus Christ and those who preach in His name; the seed refers to the Word of God; and the heart refers to the inner being of a person.

In this parable we see how the devil attacks the Word in the heart directly, emotionally, and materially. But positively we can also see how, in a prepared heart, the Word sown takes root and has a blessed fruit. So we are given a picture of something precious and good either rejected or received, used or abused. It is a battle of the heart in which the devil is actively engaged in taking away and hindering the Word of God. It is an issue in which the preparation of the heart to receive the Word of God is very significant.

The battle for the heart – rejecting the Word of God

a. The devil attacks the heart directly

‘And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts’ Mark 4.15.

Here the Word of God is heard, but has no resting place in the heart, for the Word is taken away by a direct attack of unbelief on the heart. It is immediately discarded and rejected. As the Gospel is preached, Satan’s objective is to stop a person from both believing and being saved. So in a spirit of unbelief the Word is trampled upon wilfully in the heart and taken away by the devil. Jesus says: ‘The devil is trying to stop a person hearing, believing and being saved – beware of his devices.’ It is like the saying, ‘going in one ear and out of the other’, with no reception in between. This is a heart closed to the message of God’s Word, and a mind closed to even think about it.

The opticians use what they call a puff test on your eyes, a short burst of air directly onto the eye. If you do not blink your eye it is a

The Gospel of Mark

sign your eye is hard and has become diseased. No response is actually a bad sign, not a good one. So it is with such hearing of the Word of God: it bounces off without effect.

Notice here how Satan is implicated in this battle for the heart.

b. The devil attacks the heart emotionally

'And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended' Mark 4.16-17.

Here the devil takes a different approach in the battle for the heart and mind. The Word is preached and the good news of the Kingdom is received with emotion and joy. But once again the message is not really thought through; the truth of the message is not properly considered. Its implications for life are not taken seriously, so it is the devil's deception of emotional joy in the heart without the engagement of the mind.

'And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not' Ezekiel 33.31-32.

It is a reception without true repentance and faith, and with no real submission to following Jesus as Lord. Sadly in reality the mind has been bypassed for any thoughtful contemplation of the Gospel truths. Repentance and faith are not truly exercised, and there is no real conviction of sin. The heart is moved emotionally but not spiritually. The Word itself is treated lightly.

The Battle for the Heart

Satan succeeds in putting all our emphasis on feelings of joy and emotional excitement. A profession of faith is made but not in submission to Jesus as Lord. But then temptation presents itself and overwhelms the heart and the broad road beckons again and is taken. Like the parable Jesus told of the foolish man building his house on the sand, when the flood comes it falls away.

c. The devil attacks the heart materially

‘And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful’ Mark 4.18-19.

The Lord had a very accurate understanding of the agriculture of the day. He knew the farmer had originally chopped the thistles without digging up the roots.

‘For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns’ Jeremiah 4.3.

When the seed was sown, so the thistles sprouted again with them and choked the good seed. Here we see how the devil can use even the legitimate things of life to hinder and choke spiritual life and fruit. This is one of the most common hindrances Satan uses especially for the preaching of the Gospel.

I would like us to notice here that the messages of the Lord Jesus were for all time. He, as the Son of God looking into the future, knew what our present day would be like. When Jesus preached He knew His words would have a spiritual impact for souls for all time. This parable has great relevance to this day and age, in a world of materialism, temptation and distraction.

• Cares of this world

People hear the Gospel but the cares of this world control the mind,

The Gospel of Mark

not allowing any serious thought. People have the Gospel communicated to them in witness and outreach but busyness and distractions hinder. Some hear the Word on the doorstep but the invitation to come to the Gospel service is choked out by cares. Through this parable the Lord teaches us something of the battle for the heart and mind.

‘And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares’ Luke 21.34.

But hearing the Word and it being choked out of our lives is also a problem believers are challenged with.

‘And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things’ Luke 10.41.

The Lord speaks of the cares of this world in relation to receiving the Word and bearing or not bearing fruit. Worry and anxiety can be tools Satan uses to choke the Word. He can tempt us to be over-taxed by those providential gifts from God, which should be a blessing for us. Great wisdom is required to schedule our lives and apply a disciplined approach to our time so that providential pressures do not choke out the Word of God received in the heart.

• **The deceitfulness of riches**

Providential prosperity is, for the Lord’s people, a blessing to be used wisely.

‘Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven’ Proverbs 23.5.

‘But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1 Timothy 6.9.

The Battle for the Heart

But riches can take hold of our heart in such a way as to choke out the Word of God. Riches bring with them a great responsibility: they can be used or abused in our life when our wealth and possessions become part of our image, sense of self worth, or our reason for living. This attitude chokes out the Word of God, *'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matthew 6.21).*

Riches in and of themselves are not wrong: it is our unwise use of them that can choke the Word in our life. Sadly in this state we are one of those that the Lord speaks as of bringing no fruit to maturity spiritually.

• **The lust of other pleasures**

God gives us all things richly to enjoy (*1 Timothy 6.17*). The 'all things' here given to us from God to enjoy, are those things which are wholesome for us. When the wholesome pleasures take their rightful place in the pattern of our Christian life then we can enjoy them with a clear conscience, wholeheartedly and unselfishly in the Lord. But if wholesome pleasures become our chief pursuit, aim and love, they themselves will choke the Word. How much more then will unwholesome pleasures choke the Word in our heart.

'For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world' 1 John 2.16.

If we hear the Word and go out, involving ourselves in sinful pleasures, it will undoubtedly choke the Word. What are our pleasures in life? Do we use discernment on this issue? Our consciences can become as seared with a hot iron and lose their influence in our lives (*1 Timothy 4.2*).

How does this come about? Here is an example. We watch something we know is not really good for us – a film or 'soap' that has swearing, adultery, or violence in it. As we do so our old nature, the flesh, will reach out in acceptance. The heart receives this and it

The Gospel of Mark

chokes the Word. At first we feel a deep pang of conscience and are uncomfortable. With a tender heart we recognise it affects us. But when we wilfully succumb again and again and excuse ourselves each day our hearts become hardened to such things. It becomes a way of life and we do not recognise it as sin and worldliness. We just do not see it as such. The same can be with our attitudes and conversations if we are careless in communication and insensitive.

The Lord is calling us even now to think on these things: *'He that hath ears to hear let him hear.'*

So the devil attacks the Word in our hearts directly, emotionally, and materially.

The battle for the heart – receiving the Word, God's answer

'And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred' Mark 4.20.

By contrast, the Holy Spirit prepares and protects the heart for the Word of God. The preparation of the heart to receive the Word is a vital exercise in the Christian life. It is so important in receiving the Word of God profitably. For example, how we prepare our hearts for the Lord's Day ministry is significant to our spiritual wellbeing. If we are careless about this we cannot expect to receive the Word profitably on the Lord's Day.

The Lord speaks in *Luke 8.15* about those hearing the Word with an *'honest and good heart'*. This means to receive the Word with an undivided heart; to have an open, unprejudiced heart to receive the Word of the Lord. These are the people who hear because they want to hear. They then reflect upon what they hear. The message is not just theory but is put into practice and then it bears fruit in the person's life. The message is accepted and understood; accepted by faith and evidenced by works. The test of whether the Word has been accepted is in the outcome.

The Battle for the Heart

‘...being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God’ Philippians 1.11.

We realise the Lord is saying to us in worship, ‘Give Me your heart.’

The preparation of the heart, with the enabling of the Holy Spirit, is an essential exercise and discipline for us. God prepares the ground of the heart spiritually through prayer, contemplation, conviction, thirst, and appreciation. There are steps we can take to a closer walk and communion with the Lord in our preparation for the Lord’s Day. Note David’s exercise of heart and mind in *Psalms 37.1-10*.

To enjoy fellowship and communion with God, especially in worship, means the manner and attitude in which we come to God is important. The significance of this approach and the hearing and acceptance of the Word by faith is found in its fruit – the keeping of it in the heart. It does not bounce out again but sinks in. We keep the Word in our heart; it is protected there under the power of the Holy Spirit of God. This is not only a blessing for our souls, but it is also a blessing for others. Our families, children, friends, neighbours, and our church will be affected by this fruit. It will be fruit borne graciously and patiently in God’s way and time.

‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith...’ Galatians 5.22.

There is so much blessing for your soul when receiving the Word by faith in humility and submission. The Gospel of God becomes the remedy for your sin and the means of your salvation. The promises of God become yours by faith; the assurance of God’s character revealed in His Word becomes your refuge; the Word of God becomes your guide; and the hope of Heaven becomes a certainty. It is God’s inspired Word to your soul. This is why it is vital for any church to place the highest importance on the Word of God.

Many years ago a minister said to me, ‘The problem with your

The Gospel of Mark

church is that it idolises the Bible.' It is impossible to idolise the Bible! It is possible to idolise a particular translation but not God's Word as such. If the importance of the Bible is one thing you remember, that will be to your soul's good.

Cconclusion

The devil attacks the Word in the heart directly, emotionally, and materially.

The Holy Spirit by contrast enables us to receive the Word in a prepared heart for the purpose of fruitfulness.

15. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Mark 4.21-34

Now the Lord moves from the battle of the Word to teach about the growth of the Kingdom of God, for the Word of God takes effect under the power of the Holy Spirit. Souls are converted and the Kingdom grows.

What is meant by the term ‘The Kingdom of God’?

The first point we need to make clear is that in the New Testament the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are referring to the same thing.

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ Matthew 5.3.

‘And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God’ Luke 6.20.

What does the Word of God tell us about the Kingdom of God?

It is a spiritual Kingdom in Christ Jesus.

‘Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you’ Luke 17.21.

We enter into this Kingdom by being born again spiritually.

‘Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’ John 3.5.

How this Kingdom is described?

‘For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ Romans 14.17.

- It is not of this world in a political, material sense.

The Gospel of Mark

'Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence' John 18.36.

- It cannot be moved.

'Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear' Hebrews 12.28.

- It is a growing kingdom represented by the true Church of God.
- It finds its final fulfilment in the new heavens and the new Earth.

'Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' 2 Peter 3.13.

In the passage of Scripture we are considering we can notice the light, power and growth of the Kingdom. We can also see the work of God in three Persons in these three aspects of the Kingdom: Kingdom light – Jesus Christ; Kingdom power – the Holy Spirit; and Kingdom growth – God the Father.

Kingdom light – the Gospel of God the Son, Jesus Christ

'And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath' Mark 4.21-25.

A candle is lit to give light, and surely it would be unwise and foolish to hide a lighted candle under a measuring container or under a bed. Apart from being dangerous it would give no light. The best

The Kingdom of God

place for a lighted candle is safely on a candlestick that all may benefit from the light.

Using this simple analogy, the Lord is making a connection to the Kingdom light of the Gospel. The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came to preach as the Light of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. This Gospel light must shine throughout the world and not be hidden away.

‘What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops’ Matthew 10.27.

He is teaching the apostles these truths in private. They will then preach openly, and it will not be hidden away. These truths of the Gospel will form the doctrine and foundation of the Church of the living God. They will be inscribed in God’s Word for all the world, for all generations for all time.

This Kingdom light, the glorious light of the Gospel, is centred in the Person of Jesus Christ. Several times in Scripture we are reminded of this great truth.

‘To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace’ Luke 1.79.

‘Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life’ John 8.12.

‘I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness’ John 12.46.

‘To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me’ Acts 26.18.

The Gospel of Mark

'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' 2 Corinthians 4.6.

People are drawn to the Light under the power of the Gospel. Looking to the awesome sufferings ahead for Him at Calvary, the Lord said:

'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' John 12.32.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God is the magnet which draws sinners and attracts them to Christ at Calvary. But undoubtedly here is meant not only the preaching of the Gospel but the fruit of the Gospel in witness. The effect of the Gospel should not be hidden; what has gone on in the private place of the heart will be revealed. It will show in our love, care, compassion, kindness, unselfishness, words, and attitude: light!

In this context the Lord reminds the apostles of the responsibility of hearing seriously and attentively. If you have been blessed with a desire after Christ then take seriously what you hear about Him. For there is a principle in spiritual growth – the more you hear of the Gospel by faith, the more you will grow. If you make good use of what you have already heard, and are faithful in that, more will be given for your growth.

God is a most generous God in Christ Jesus towards His people. He rewards devotion and diligence. This is one of the reasons why worship centred on the Word of God is so important for our souls. It is God's chief means of giving more spiritual light, food and growth. But if we discard the Word in worship and trivialise it, then even the little we have will be lost in worldliness.

This reminds us of a very important point about true Christianity. True Christianity is never static, inasmuch as we are either growing up or growing cold. The committed Christian who is earnest and

The Kingdom of God

discerning in hearing the true Gospel will receive more abundantly. The casual Christian will not grow spiritually, neither will he stay the same but will backslide and forget truth.

Remember Jesus was speaking here first to the apostles who would convey these truths to the Church. But of that group of twelve, eleven of them took heed how and what they heard and grew spiritually. One, Judas, did not – he did not take care how he heard Jesus and the little he had was taken away. He engaged in unprofitable conversation and betrayed Jesus, and subsequently hung himself. Judas is an extreme case of a very solemn principle. We are responsible for how and what we hear. We are responsible for what we give out and subsequently receive.

The same principle can apply practically. If we commit ourselves to only to listening to what is true and helpful and kind, then we will find such commitment will positively affect how we develop as a person. But if we constantly engage in gossip or running people down and do not take care what or how we hear, then this will negatively affect how we develop as a person. For the way we measure out to others does affect the measure we receive from others.

There is a saying, 'Birds of feather flock together'. If we engage in profitable conversation we generally find those that are of the same mind will engage with us; there is a giving out profitably and a receiving profitably. But if we engage constantly in gossip and running people down then those of the same mind will gather. If we give out unprofitably we are also likely to receive unprofitably. Those who behave in a godly manner will increase in godliness through the profitable Word of God. Those who behave in an ungodly manner will increase in ungodliness by the unprofitable spirit of worldliness. We are either growing up or growing down. The same principles can apply practically in our lives as to whether we are developing positively or negatively.

The Gospel of Mark

We can summarise these verses this way:

- The candle is the light of the Gospel centred in Christ Jesus the Lord, the Light of the World.
- This Gospel is not to be hid but to be proclaimed abroad throughout the world.
- The fruit of this Gospel is evidenced in people shining for Christ as lights in this world. Their testimony is to be seen in the world for the glory of God and not hidden.
- We are to take care how we hear the truth of the Gospel that it might positively affect our lifestyles.
- If we are committed and serious and give of ourselves to the Lord we will receive further blessing from Him. If we are casual about the Gospel in hearing and in giving of ourselves to its message we will backslide.

Kingdom power – God the Holy Spirit

‘And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come’ Mark 4.26-29.

Here we are reminded of another very profound and solemn truth about true Christianity. While you can automatically by birth be known as a Muslim, Hindu, Protestant or Roman Catholic, you cannot automatically, by the family you are born into, be a true spiritually born-again Christian. Christianity is not by natural birth or nationality; it is by the new birth spiritually from above.

This is uniquely the work of God and by the Holy Spirit of God. The Kingdom of God can only increase by the power of God and not by any other means.

The Kingdom of God

'So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase' 1 Corinthians 3.7.

When a farmer plants a field of corn he does so knowing he is dependent upon the weather pattern for its fruit. In the first section Jesus has reminded us of our responsibility in hearing and proclaiming the Kingdom light. Here, in this section, Jesus is reminding us that the fruit, the increase, the blessing, the growth, is from Him.

Each week the Word of God is sown by preaching but its blessing, its impact, is totally dependent upon God. A pastor explains, exhorts, warns, calls, urges, pleads, and comforts, but the success is totally dependent upon God. God knows into which heart that Word has taken root and beginning to work for good in the person. In God's time the power of God's Spirit descends upon His garden and the fruit becomes evident.

'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits' Song of Solomon 4.16.

So there is a partnership in God's order between our diligence to proclaim the Gospel light of the Kingdom and our dependence upon God to bless. The Kingdom power of the Holy Spirit always works in connection with the Gospel light of the Kingdom.

A man with business acumen and powerful communication and appeal can build a congregation around him. There are methods that can be used to appeal to and attract people to come, and there are many such cases. However, the Lord is speaking here not about building a congregation but building the Kingdom of God. He is speaking here about building His Church, and this depends totally upon the work of the Holy Spirit. So it is that we are called to diligence in proclaiming the Gospel Kingdom of light. But our labours are always dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit of God.

The Gospel of Mark

'So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy' Romans 9.16.

The Church is to be built for God's glory but He does this in partnership with the sowing of the Word of God.

Notice here again the emphasis on the Word of God being sown – that is what God will bless. It is not the message of man that the Holy Spirit blesses, but the message of the Gospel light of His Kingdom. This message will take root in people's lives and grow and become evident as a true plant that will bear fruit.

Finally, at the end of the world, the Church will be ready for the Harvest. God, in His perfect time, when all ordained unto eternal life are ready for Glory in Christ Jesus, will bring in the final harvest and God's Kingdom, His Church, will shine in all its glory in Christ Jesus.

Kingdom growth – God the Father

'And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: but when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it' Mark 4.30-32.

Here the Lord is teaching us about the relentless growth of the Kingdom of God from humble beginnings. Jesus said:

'I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' Matthew 16.18.

To illustrate this growth the Lord uses the illustration of the mustard seed. Though the smallest seed, when grown it is greater than all herbs and shoots out great branches for the benefit of birds.

A friend was telling me the other day how just one Cotoneaster spreading plant that was planted some years ago has now spread all

The Kingdom of God

along the side of his driveway to the front door. So is the Kingdom of God, the New Testament Church of God. It started with eleven men hiding in an upper room for fear of the Jews. The resurrected Lord visited them and empowered them by the Holy Spirit of God according to God's will. Those same men, plus a replacement for Judas and joined later by Paul, became courageous men of God. From this little group of men the Church grew. On the Day of Pentecost and afterwards thousands were added to the Church. These Christians were despised and persecuted and yet had a blessed testimony for the good of society. As the persecution intensified in Jerusalem the Church was scattered throughout Europe, Africa and Asia. So the Kingdom of God like a mustard seed grew mightily from humble beginnings in an upper room and spread through the world.

God's Kingdom is growing day by day, not by natural birth as for other religions, but by spiritual birth, a miracle of God in people personally, graciously granting to them new birth and forgiveness of sin in Christ Jesus. This new birth grants them entrance into God's Kingdom, His Church, to serve Him here for His glory, as they await their final entrance to Heaven.

The picture of the birds sitting on its branches could refer also to society benefitting from Christianity. Throughout the centuries hundreds of thousands of people have benefitted from a compassionate Church. In the UK our schools and hospitals had their origins in a caring Christian Church. A Christian Church working in the community should be a blessing and positive influence for good.

The Kingdom of God – its growth according to the Triune God

God the Son: Jesus Christ, the Light that must not be hid but proclaimed to all the world.

God the Holy Spirit: alone has the unique, personal power to bring spiritual life and entrance into the Kingdom.

The Gospel of Mark

God the Father: in His divine sovereignty both planned and oversees the mighty growth of the Kingdom.

The passage concludes with another reference to the parables being related simply to the congregation, but the exposition, the deeper meaning behind them, He expounded to His disciples, teaching them all the essential truths needful for salvation and sanctification and the Christian life. The apostles then later, with such doctrinal knowledge, preached that truth as evidenced in the *Book of Acts* and the Letters. That doctrine and truth became the fundamental foundation of theology for the Christian Church. It was Christ-centred truth that was preached with the enabling of the Holy Spirit in God the Father's will.

16. WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?

Mark 4.35-41

The teaching of the Lord regarding the growth of the Kingdom of God fits in perfectly with this next section. Here the Lord determines to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee to save a man in a desperate state. But the spread of the Kingdom of God even to such a wretched man must take place after a storm. To get to the other side of the sea to minister to him meant experiencing a great storm that night.

This account of the stilling of the storm reminds us powerfully of both the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ. A weary Man lays down to sleep in the boat exhausted, just like us getting tired in body. But He is woken in the storm and His deity shines in miraculously stilling the storm.

In this short account we have the serenity of the God-Man revealed in contrast with the fear and frailty of men in the crisis of a storm. Notice also the Christ-centred nature of the account:

- *He saith unto them* (v 35);
- *He was in the rear of the ship* (v 38);
- *He arose and rebuked the wind* (v 39);
- *He questions them* (v 40).

'He saith unto them...'

'And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side' Mark 4.35.

There was more than one purpose in this journey across the lake. Not only was it for the glory of God and the spiritual development of the disciples in the coming storm, but there was an unsaved man the other side of the lake ordained unto eternal life. Was he a good man? Was he a respectable man? Was he a man who earned a special

The Gospel of Mark

visit from Jesus? The Lord Jesus crossed over to the other side of the lake for the purpose of saving a demon-possessed man; a man so possessed he was kept under guard, chained and shackled. Yet he often broke free and went into the wilderness deranged and wild and unstoppable. He was a wicked, dangerous, and terrifying man under the influence of many demonic spirits. For this man the Lord crossed the lake!

Does this not speak to us of the love of Christ to needy sinners? In the same way the Lord went via Samaria to speak to the woman at the well who was in an immoral relationship. Do you not think the Lord would be willing to make such a journey for you, to go to such effort for you? Yes; He has done much more than that. He has come down from Heaven and gone across the other side to Calvary.

'They took him even as he was in the ship'

'And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships' Mark 4.36.

The Lord had been preaching and was no doubt tired and exhausted, but they took Him as He was. His great desire now was to get to the other side of the sea, knowing He had to minister to a desperate man. There may have been those advising Him to rest first then make the journey to the other side the next day, but the disciples knew whatever His physical condition His Word must be obeyed – His Word is always right.

Jesus said, *'Let us pass over unto the other side'* (verse 35), but to get to the other side was through a terrible storm. We experience a terrible storm in our life, to the extent that the only Person we can look to is the Lord. He stills the storm, having taught us through it. He assures us on the other side of the storm that there is a purpose for it.

Now the Lord Jesus Christ knew all that was before them on the

Where Is Your Faith?

lake. He knew there would be a storm; that the disciples would be terrified by it; that He would still the storm; and that He would need to rebuke His disciples for not exercising faith. Nothing took the Lord by surprise, yet knowing what was ahead He was most assuredly in the boat with His disciples. By this action we can be assured that the Lord is One Who is with us in the storms of life – in the boat.

This event we are considering is known as the divine, permissive will of the Lord. The Lord was working for the purpose of blessing through trial. The Lord was there at the beginning of the trial, He was there during the trial, and at the end. The psalmist really believed this truth when he said,

*‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they
comfort me’ Psalm 23.4.*

The events that followed on the lake culminated in the glory of God and the spiritual development of the disciples. It is unlikely we will understand all of what is going on in our times of trial. However, here are three fundamental principles that we do know and we are called to accept by faith:

1. God’s name will ultimately be glorified in the trial;
2. God will use the trial to develop our lives spiritually;
3. The Lord is willing to get into the boat of our trial and be with us in it.

‘He was...asleep on a pillow’

*‘And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow’
Mark 4.38a.*

Here we are reminded of the very real human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was exhausted and He took rest. He was unashamed to take rest and go to sleep when He was tired. But this sleep symbolised something deeper than physical rest. He slept in the knowledge that

The Gospel of Mark

He was in the perfect will of His Father. He slept knowing that whatever danger arose His life was safe, for the only death He would ever experience was at Calvary, not here on the lake. His life was immortal until His work was done here on Earth. It is the same for us.

He slept with a pure conscience and a pure heart. Jesus slept a wholesome sleep, knowing He was wearied through serving others for the glory of God. Jesus slept knowing He was in the perfect will of God. So it was that He was able to sleep in peace on a pillow as a perfect Man despite a most terrible storm. Jesus slept because He was weary in a wholesome manner doing the will of His Father.

Sleep for us can be very difficult in the midst of the storms of life. How can we ourselves find rest in the storms of life? By remembering that the government of this trial is on His shoulders (*Isaiah 9.6*).

'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee'
Psalm 55.22.

Faith rests in Who the Lord is and what He says and what He will accomplish on behalf of His people. Rest for the believer in the storms of life can only come as we rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass' *Psalm 37.7.*

'They awake him'

'...and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?' *Mark 4.38b.*

The Sea of Galilee, also termed a lake, is located in the north of the valley of Jordan. It is about 13 miles (21 km) in length and 7½ miles (12 km) in width. It lies approximately 680 feet (207 m) below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. Its bed is a depression surrounded by hills, especially on the east side, with its precipitous cliffs. When cool currents rush down from Mount Hermon (9,200 feet / 2804 m)

Where is Your Faith?

or from elsewhere, they travel through narrow passages between the steep hills surrounding the lake. These currents collide with the heated air above the lake and the result is a tempest. The violent waves whip the water into a fury, causing high waves that vent themselves over the boats. In the *New King James Version* Matthew records that this windstorm arose suddenly, without warning (*Matthew 8.24*).

In that terrible windstorm the boat began taking in water. From a human standpoint they were in great danger of sinking amidst this terrible storm. Now the men sailing this boat on the lake were experienced. They had witnessed many a storm on the lake before, but this storm was different. It was the ‘mother of all storms’ they had experienced.

The term ‘great storm’ has the meaning here of a tumult. The disciples were absolutely terrified and feared for their lives, so to a man they come and look to the Lord Jesus. The three Gospel accounts record the different ways they expressed their fear. Matthew records that one group called out to the Lord with an earnest plea, ‘*Lord save us*’ (*Matthew 8.25*); Mark records that one group called out in an accusative manner, ‘*Master, carest thou not that we perish?*’ (*Mark 4.38*); and Luke records, ‘*Master, master, we perish*’ (*Luke 8.24*). The positive element of this action is at least they came to Jesus. The difficulty arises in the manner in which they came. They recognised Him as Lord and Master; they believed He was able to save them, but in so doing they questioned His divine care for them.

Now whenever we doubt the divine care of the Lord for His people, that doubt quenches real faith. It acts like a dark cloud covering the warming sun of faith. However dark the pathway may be in your life, beware of the dark cloud of unbelief that questions God’s care. The unbelief of suspicion about the dealings of the Lord in our life is a dreadful weed that chokes faith. Rather, ‘*Cast[ing] all your care upon Him, for He careth for you*’ (*1 Peter 5.7*). He shows His care through

The Gospel of Mark

creation, conversion, and Calvary, by sending the Comforter, in the Church, and by granting us a heavenly crown.

'And he arose'

'And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm'
Mark 4.39.

Here we see the supreme serenity of the Lord of all creation. There was absolutely no fear in His demeanour or behaviour. All was calm in His mind, in His actions, and in His ministry. He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water. They ceased and there was calm.

This is a picture for us of the wonderful, all-conquering victory of Christ over death. Humanly speaking the disciples seemed as if they were facing certain death. The boat was taking in water and was on the point of sinking. But the Lord arose, the Lord intervened, and the Lord commanded calm where there was fear and despair.

So it was in the resurrection of the Lord.

*Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes.
Robert Lowry, 1826-1899*

The disciples, locked away in a room in Jerusalem in fear after Calvary, were given hope and assurance because Jesus arose and conquered death. Paul writes to the Church at Corinth regarding this truth.

'But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord' 1 Corinthians 15.57-58.

Where is Your Faith?

'He said unto them...'

'And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?' Mark 4.40.

The disciples were privileged in the storm to have Jesus in the boat with them, a visible sign of security and protection. Do you by faith have Jesus with you in the boat of your life? It was impossible for the boat to sink and all be lost eternally with Jesus in the boat.

This event reminds us that with Jesus in the boat of our life we will arrive at our heavenly haven. As Jesus had a divine purpose to get to the other side to save the demon-possessed man, so God Almighty has a divine purpose in ensuring everyone ordained unto eternal life is saved. Those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord will get to the other side – the Canaan-Land of Glory.

So it was that Jesus asked, *'Why are you so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?'* The meaning here is that you have faith but you are not exercising it – unbelief and fear is clouding it. This is recorded in Luke as, *'Where is your faith?'* (Luke 8.25). 'You are behaving as though you have no faith, just as an unbeliever would in a crisis. The way you have come to Me is in an accusative sense. Your faith needs to focus on Me, not on the storm! It needs both exercising and deepening.' The way that faith is deepened is through an ever-increasing assurance in the power of Christ.

Have you ever wondered about the significance of those in the other little ships? Those who had got into the other ships were following Him also. They experienced the storm; they experienced the miracle as did those in the boat with Jesus. The other ships remind us that whatever boat we are in we all need the same Saviour, Jesus Christ. The disciples were privileged to have a special nearness to the Lord Jesus Christ, but those in the other little ships were no less precious to the Lord Jesus Christ. In the stilling of the storm they were blessed at the same time for they followed the same Saviour.

The Gospel of Mark

We may sometimes feel our littleness as a church in the great scheme of things, like those in the little ships. But the most important point is Who are we with, Who we are following. Those in the little ship were with Him in their hearts. They left the safety of the shore to go with Him.

‘What manner of man is this?’

*‘And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’
Mark 4.41.*

Notice here how the Lord rebukes just the wind and the water, showing us that the Lord can use the elements of nature whenever He will to teach us and strengthen our faith. According to His perfect wisdom God can use providential experiences to sanctify and strengthen faith. He can intervene at any moment in time and bring calm where there is a storm.

The lake changed from raging, swirling, and angry to being as calm as a mill pond, like a mirror – silence and stillness. The One Who commanded the wind and the waves then is the One Who reigns in Heaven now. Let us humble ourselves before the almighty God over creation. In our times of testing and trial in the storms of life remember this, when the Lord seems unaware, uninterested, uncaring, unhelpful, oblivious, or asleep. As God He is fully aware and can in a moment appear to bring peace into your soul.

The evidence before their eyes of the divine power of Christ brings another type of fear, a fear mixed with worship, that directs them to focus not on the storm but on the God over the storm. But the ultimate end of the experience is the test of what spiritual blessing we attain through it. *‘Truly this [is] the Son of God’ (Matthew 27.54). ‘Jesus only’ Mark 9.8).*

Conclusion

- The Lord was at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of this awesome experience.
- He ordained the trial and was with them in it.
- He purposed to develop their faith through trial.
- He revealed more of His majesty and deity.
- He demonstrated His care in His mercy, even when they doubted it.
- In the end they marvelled at His power and majesty.

17. WHAT GREAT THINGS GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU

Mark 5.1-20

The Lord has just calmed a terrible storm and the disciples are overwhelmed in awe and reverence. Now the Lord enters into the country of the Gadarenes to engage and deal with a far greater storm, a storm of evil spirits which were totally ruining the life of a man living there. We tend to think the worst storms are the physical, but actually the worst are those of spiritual darkness. Into this storm steps the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, full of compassion and courage. There is absolutely nothing that can stop our Lord accomplishing His sovereign, saving purposes. God will build His Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (*Matthew 16.18*).

To show this truth in its reality we are given a description of a person in the prison of demonic possession. He was helpless and hopeless, without a friend in the world apart from Jesus, the Man Who makes the difference. However desperate and lonely a person is, there is always Jesus. He alone remains as the Friend of sinners to deliver.

A terrible condition

‘And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones’ Mark 5.1-5.

The Gospel of Mark

He was an outcast from society, rejected, unmanageable, untameable, unable to be bound, and a naked tomb dweller. He had lost any sense of personal dignity as a human being, and was without any hope in this world. He was in a pit. His name was Legion, so called because of the many demons that had entered into his mind. He had been in this condition a long time and all attempts to control him had failed. This man's condition was truly terrible, shocking, and frightening to behold, yet the Lord Jesus has compassion on the man and met him at his point of need.

There is no case too shocking, difficult, or terrible for Him to deliver and save from, according to God's will. Even this poor man, who lived among the tombs, was not beyond the almighty power of God to save. Whatever your condition is you are not beyond the almighty power of Jesus to save you.

A terrifying prospect

'But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him, and cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many. And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country. Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea. And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done' Mark 5.6-14.

What Great Things God Has Done For You

Directly Jesus landed on the sea shore the demented man came straight to Him. He fell down in front of the Lord. Something compelled him to come to Jesus; something working in him compelled him to fall down at the Saviour's feet and not attack Him, yet at the same time an horrendous battle is being fought in his inner being and mind. The demonic unclean spirit, representing the many within the man, recognised Jesus. Speaking through this man, it cried out not to be tormented by Jesus. For many a year the unclean spirits had been tormenting this poor man relentlessly, but now the unclean spirits were tormented!

Why was the unclean spirit speaking thus through this man? Purity meets evil and evil is tormented by the pure holiness, goodness, and compassion of Jesus. Here the demonic unclean spirits within the man realised they were coming under the judgment of God. Notice here the authority of Jesus recognised by the demons. The day of judgment is acknowledged. In the *Gospel of Matthew* he records that the unclean spirits knew their time of torment was coming.

'And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?' Matthew 8.29.

Luke adds in his *Gospel* record that they requested not to be sent into the deep.

'And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep' Luke 8.31.

'The deep' here means hell, the bottomless pit. 'Do not command us to go into the abyss.' Their argument is that it is not yet the time of judgment.

Here is a very strange thing. Unclean spirits fear hell and the abyss and beg their execution to be put off. Yet humans, made in the image of God, mock and deny there even is such a place!

The Gospel of Mark

The evil spirits realised they must go somewhere and pigs were better than the dreadful abyss. The demons got their request, thinking they could abide in the pigs for a while. However, while they could control the mind of a man, driving him into the wilderness, they had no control over the pigs without souls, which ran headlong down the mountain slope into the sea.

We see another evidence of how creations groans and suffers through the Fall, even the pigs. Mark tells us there were two thousand. This part of the region was populated largely by Gentiles, hence the number of pigs. The amount of pigs was a sign of the area's rebellion from Jewish tradition and ceremonial law.

Notice here how the Lord did not command the demons to go into the pigs; He just permitted their request. It was the request of the evil spirits to go into them, and the Lord in His wisdom simply permitted it. In any event, one human soul delivered by the Lord is of incomparable value to that of animals without souls.

A transforming outcome

'And they come to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid' Mark 5.15.

Now when we consider the condition of this poor man it may seem we are far removed from such a state. However, when we consider the state of our hearts by nature we realise that actually we are not so far removed, for in our minds we purposely rebel against God and sin uncontrollably. We break the restraining chains of our conscience; the power of lust, jealousy, and hatred can overwhelm our minds, actions, and words. Our state by nature in rebellion against God in our mind is a terrible condition. What this man was visibly, because of the demons indwelling him, we are in measure by nature. By nature our hearts are rebellious, unmanageable, dwelling in darkness, aggressive towards God, constantly breaking the law of God, losing our decency

What Great Things God Has Done For You

in the inner recesses of the mind: we are evil. We live in a world where spiritual darkness and violence is active in films and computer games. There would be no reason for an 18 rated warning if it were not so. Why is it each evening the television has to warn, 'This film contains violence – upsetting scenes – strong language'? Each evening without realising, the television authorities acknowledge such things as the conscience, and evil and bad influence.

Jesus taught that what we engage with in mind and heart is equivalent in God's sight to doing the same physically. When converted a Christian will separate from such things. Church leaders are particularly responsible in this area to set a standard and lead the way.

'Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver' Acts 19.19.

It should be noted the devil is restrained in his evil purposes by the sovereign God in this world. If it were not so life would be like hell on Earth everywhere in the world, not only in limited parts as it is today. Nevertheless, every person without God in their life is vulnerable to the indwelling influence of evil. How can we be secure? How can we be delivered? How can we be protected? By the precious blood of Jesus, the Saviour of the world.

'And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it' Colossians 2.15.

Only Jesus has the power to bring us to our right mind protect us from evil and the devil.

Here, through the mighty saving power of the Lord Jesus, the man stricken with the evil spirit, possessed man is delivered. He is described as being now clothed and in his right mind. Physically he is now clothed and mentally he is now in his right mind. Spiritually he

The Gospel of Mark

is now clothed in the righteousness of Christ and his mind is now at peace with God. This is truly to be in your right mind.

The evidence of being truly converted and in your right mind is seen in your attitude towards Jesus. You will want to learn of Him as your Teacher; you will want to be with Him as your Guide; you will submit yourself willingly to Him as your Lord; you will be a person of one mind – a spiritual mind. Every conversion is a miracle of God and every conversion delivers us from the dominion of sin. Here is true transformation: the presence of Christ disturbs, overturns, separates, transforms, brings blessing, and enriches spiritually. God in Christ takes a person under total depravity, saves them and gives them a new nature by the Holy Spirit. They are no longer a child of the darkness to be devil-possessed, or to live, play or dabble in the darkness; they are a child of light walking with Christ and learning of Him.

‘...to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me’ Acts 26.18.

‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places’ Ephesians 6.12.

A tragic request

‘And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had

What Great Things God Has Done For You

compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel' Mark 5.16-20.

The transformation shocked the onlookers. The men looking after the pigs rushed back in fear into the city and through the countryside to give the news. In fear they gave their account. The Man called Jesus had healed the demon-possessed man, and the whole stock of pigs were drowned.

What was the response? A multitude came to Jesus to see what had happened. They were faced with two realities: a man totally transformed for good; and a huge herd of pigs lost in the lake. Great fear gripped them. At the crossroads of life they did not want their lives to be changed; they did not want to lose any more material goods; they resented any disturbance in their lives. They took absolutely no pleasure in seeing the demon-possessed man healed and in his right mind. In reality they would have preferred it if the demon-possessed man was still dwelling among the tombs, out of sight, out of mind, and the pigs had been preserved. 'Surely two thousand pigs are worth more to us than one demon-possessed man who has caused us so much grief!' He was worthless to them; the pigs had monetary value. 'What if such a thing was to happen again? The Lord is "too hot" for us to handle, too powerful, too authoritative.'

So they sent Jesus away. He got back into that boat which had endured the terrible storm. He sailed back on that same lake and returned to the other side. The whole multitude as one man had made a decision. Rather than listen to Jesus, and also bring sick people to Him to be healed, they sent Him away. Despite the evidence of healing before their eyes a great shock and fear of material loss loomed greater in them. The owners of the pigs could have repented of their own sin and enjoyed blessing from the Lord.

Maybe it is so with you. You see a friend or colleague whose life has

The Gospel of Mark

been totally transformed by Jesus. You are shaken by the power of the Lord and at the same time fear to have your own life shaken. So you in effect ask Jesus to depart from you; your god remains material and your heart hardened. What a tragic decision to make in the face of the love and compassion of Christ evidenced in conversion!

A testimony of praise

Understandably the healed and delivered man deeply desires to be with Jesus. His prayer was right, looking to Christ as a Refuge, but he was wrong in thinking His physical presence was vital for living the Christian life. Christ was now present within him by the Holy Spirit. But the Lord commissions him to be an evangelist to the city. He was one of the first preachers of the Gospel to the Gentiles. His message was simple and yet profound: the great things God had done for him. His testimony was to praise God, not to bring attention to himself. His testimony worshipped Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah.

His testimony started at home and then spread outside. He told the city the great things Jesus had done for him. He was wholehearted, diligent, and conscientious. The whole city without exception must know what the Lord had done. Jesus found him as a demoniac and left him as an evangelist. Here we are reminded of the importance of a God-glorifying testimony as part of our calling as Christians. To do this faithfully and for the glory of God is the most worthwhile exercise we can engage in.

Conclusion

It is clear that throughout this event the Lord is in complete and calm control. He, in the midst of a terrible storm, in the realm of principalities and powers, delivered and commanded. He most truly is the Prince of Peace. He calmed a violent storm and calmed a violent man.

May the Lord deal with violence in our own minds – anger, bitterness, and rebellion – and do great things for us.

18. FAITH EXERCISED IN HUMILITY

Mark 5.21-43

'And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea' Mark 5.21.

The Lord on one side of the lake had been rejected by a Gentile multitude. Here, as the Lord comes to the other side, a Jewish multitude gathered to Him. 'Go away from us!' on one side is changed to, 'Come to us!' on the other. Luke records they were glad to receive Him for they were waiting for Him on the other side.

This is a picture of the human race divided along the lines of those rejecting and those receiving Jesus. At Calvary, two other men were crucified with Jesus, one on each side, one a believer and the other an unbeliever. What side of the lake or the Cross are you numbered among – 'Go away from us', or 'Come to us'?

In this passage of Scripture we are given the account of two amazing miracles. One miracle for a lady replaced despair with deliverance; the other for a girl replaced death with life. Both miracles bring our attention to the transformation only Jesus can make in our lives, for He is the Healer and Giver of physical and spiritual life.

In the account the sick girl's father and the sick woman come from totally different backgrounds, yet both are united in their high esteem for Jesus. Here is the safest place for unity, a high esteem for Jesus. For both of them their testimony is quite simple – only Jesus will do; only Jesus can deliver; Jesus only. This is the place where the Holy Spirit brings us in our whole being for conversion – a total, humble trust in the Lord alone.

The Gospel of Mark

A ruler on his knees in humble faith

‘And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet, and besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live. And Jesus went with him; and much people followed him, and thronged him’ Mark 5.22-24.

Jairus was an extremely important man in Jewish society, a person respected and esteemed as a ruler. But Jairus had a problem that his standing, position, wisdom, and good works had no authority over. His only daughter was dying and in his understandable grief he goes directly to the only One Who could save.

Jairus had heard about Jesus. He had probably already witnessed a previous miracle of Jesus. The name of Jesus would have undoubtedly come up in his leaders’ meetings at the synagogue. It is evident by now that Jairus truly believed in Jesus as Lord over life, and went to Him in faith. His faith brought him to his knees in humility. He begged the Lord to come to his house.

Here we are given an example of unreserved, humble faith and identification with Jesus. The term ‘besought’ indicates that pride and independence is replaced here by humility and dependence. He was helpless in and of himself to save his daughter and begged Jesus to do so in humility and dependence.

Humble faith tested

a. Delay

There was great urgency in the matter, and understandably Jairus would want Jesus at his home urgently. Thankfully Jesus was now walking towards his home. Nevertheless a great crowd thronged Him and progress was slow. Then there was a longer interruption. Jesus talked to a women who had been remarkably healed by Him. Jesus stopped to enable her to give her testimony. What patience needed to

Faith Exercised in Humility

be exercised here by Jairus. Jairus would learn that God's sovereign permissive delays are not actually denials. So for us in the experience of life: we face distractions, set-backs, delays, and disappointments and have to exercise faith.

b. Death

'While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further? As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe' Mark 5.35-36.

Then, to add to the trauma, Jairus was told that his daughter had now died and not to trouble the Teacher. Jesus overheard this conversation and graciously turned His attention to him and ministers to him. Matthew picks up the account at this point and records Jairus as worshipping Jesus and saying, *'My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live' (Matthew 9.18).*

Here the faith of Jairus shines the brightest. What a testimony this is! How much brighter did this man's faith shine in the very deepest trial. What an effect it must have had upon those who heard Jairus give this affirmation of faith. In the face of death he still worshipped Jesus and still trusted in Him, and in so doing was comforted by Jesus. The Lord, in Jairus's time of testing, said, *'Be not afraid, only believe.'*

Humble faith rewarded

'And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter, and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly. And when he was come in, he saith unto them, Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the

The Gospel of Mark

damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying. And he took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment. And he charged them straitly that no man should know it; and commanded that something should be given her to eat' Mark 5.37-43.

When Jesus arrived at the house there was a tremendous noise going on, described as a tumult. The flute players were already there and a noisy crowd wailing because the girl had died. Culture had taken over the scene and the family and the house. Mark records they wept and wailed loudly. For sure there was no doubt in their minds the girl had died, but Jesus had no time for this noise, this tradition, this so-called tumult.

Jesus asked, 'Why make this commotion and weep?' He knew the crowd that had gathered were taken up emotionally, not sincerely. He also knew this was going to be a time when He would show His great power and authority over death!

Jesus said she was not dead but sleeping. What did He mean here when it was evident to all she had died? When the Lord speaks of death in this way as sleeping, He does so in the context of restoration of life. He refers in the same way to the death of Lazarus: '*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth*' (John 11.11), and yet He spoke also of him being dead. Here Jesus is to show how He can give renewed life to a physically dead person.

However, the professional mourners ridiculed the Lord when He spoke of her not being dead but sleeping. In the original it means they laughed in His face in a rude, mocking manner. They showed great disrespect, despising Him, and so they needed to be moved away from the scene. Only the parents and Peter, James and John were allowed by

Faith Exercised in Humility

Jesus into the room with the girl. With great tenderness and authority Jesus took her by the hand and said, 'Little girl, arise!' Immediately her spirit returned to her body and she got up, completely and utterly healed. Realising her physical need as Creator, He commanded that she should be given food to eat.

This is a vital point here. One moment Jesus triumphs over death, the next moment He appeases hunger. There is no measure to His power or to His compassions, which fail not (*Lamentations 3.22*).

From this miracle we can take great encouragement from the compassion of the Lord Jesus. Spiritually speaking we can also come alongside Jairus in his concern for his only child as an encouragement for parents to continually plead with Jesus to come and raise our children to life spiritually. 'Lord, lay Your hand upon my child and he/she will live' – the prayer of faith for the soul. Here Jairus begged Jesus to come to his home. Our prayer can also be, 'Be present, O Lord, in our home to bless our children!'

A sufferer on her knees in humble faith

'And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the

The Gospel of Mark

truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague' Mark 5.25-34.

This lady had suffered an incurable condition for twelve years. All her money and assets had been used up in her quest for healing. She had suffered many treatments from many physicians in a vain attempt to make her well. She could not be healed by any, and rather grew worse. But at the end of all things, and at the end of all human help, this poor woman receives the gift of faith. 'If I can just touch the hem of the garment of Jesus, I will be healed.' So it was she pressed through the crowd to simply touch the hem of His garment.

This again is an example of extraordinary faith – faith in the Person and power of Jesus to heal her completely in body and soul, for this woman not only wanted healing physically; she wanted to be well in her soul also. In the *Authorised Version* we have the more accurate rendering of being 'made whole' – her deliverance was complete.

Why did the Lord insist on speaking to this woman who had been healed? Because she needed to give her testimony and not be a secret believer. So this woman came trembling in humility and in faith to worship the Lord and fall at His feet. She declared to the Lord, for His praise and glory, in front of a huge multitude, the reason she had touched Him. She had a desperate need that only Jesus could meet; she believed now that only Jesus could heal her. She testified to Jesus in front of the crowd why she touched the hem of His garment, and how she was healed immediately and completely and felt so well in body and soul.

Jesus encouraged her. Her faith had brought her to Jesus to be healed; her faith was the channel. Now she could go in peace and be healed and saved. She was looked on by Jesus as a daughter, a spiritual child of His, and could be of good cheer.

From this miracle we can learn:

Faith Exercised in Humility

- It is only when we come to the point of 'Jesus only' can we be saved;
- The road to that point can be a long haul, exhausting and wearisome;
- We may try many philosophies and ideas to find satisfaction in the soul, all to no avail. Our condition just gets worse;
- There is no relief until we come to Jesus as our only hope, in utter and complete dependence upon Him. Both these miracles show the same utter dependence upon the Lord;
- Both these miracles show the power and compassion of the Lord; and
- When Jesus heals and forgives, He gives of Himself, pointing us to Calvary.

Conclusion

Let us remind ourselves of the key principles of faith found in this passage. Signs of true and living faith are:

- a. Recognition of the deity of Christ;
- b. Recognition of your total dependence upon Him;
- c. A wholehearted purpose in coming to Him;
- d. The realisation that your faith is motivated by the Person and work of Jesus;
- e. Relentless perseverance in spite of set-backs, delay, a crowd, death, and ridicule; and
- f. The reward of faith – telling Jesus and knowing Jesus for yourself.

19. UNBELIEF IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS

Mark 6.1-6

Jesus was returning home to Nazareth for the first time since the commencement of His public ministry. One would have thought He would have been received with great respect and reverence. One would have thought He would have been given every opportunity to minister among His own people, for the Lord Jesus had been preaching with power, healing with power, and performing miracles with authority.

The word used for miracles here is ‘mighty works’, meaning works of almighty power, works of great significance. Normally when a person arrives back having accomplished something remarkable, there is praise and respect. For example, a gold medal-winning athlete on their homecoming is given a warm reception. The people of the town are pleased to identify themselves with that person.

How different was the reception of the Lord Jesus in His home town. At this point in the Lord’s ministry His fame was going before Him; He was at the height of public popularity. Remember the multitudes awaiting Him on this side of the Sea of Galilee. News of His ministry would have undoubtedly reached His family and residents of Nazareth before His return.

The Lord Jesus never courted publicity or praise; in fact it was the reverse. On more than one occasion He instructed that His miraculous deeds should not be spread abroad. Nevertheless the record of His reception on His return to His home town is one of the saddest in Scripture for, even though our Lord did not seek the praise of man, the responsibility of man is to praise Him from Whom all blessings flow.

The Gospel of Mark

Instead of joy and praise, and respect and reverence, there was rejection. Instead of warmth there was scepticism; instead of respect there was dishonour. The people's unbelieving reception of the Lord Jesus brought condemnation upon themselves because they acknowledged His wisdom and power, but then wilfully rejected Him.

Previously we are given examples of great faith. In this chapter we are given examples of great unbelief. *Mark 5* is known as the chapter of great faith, but *Mark 6* as the chapter of no faith, demonstrating great unbelief by the religious leaders in particular, despite the clear evidence of the amazing ministry of the Lord Jesus! They determined to reject Him in unbelief, to hinder His ministry, and to undermine Him.

So Mark, inspired by the Holy Spirit, provides a vivid contrast between revelation and rejection. Revealed to them is the authoritative teaching ministry of Jesus and also His miraculous works. Set against this evidence like a dark cloud is the determined, wilful rejection of unbelief.

Following the pattern of Mark's account we start with the acknowledgment of the power of Jesus, and then consider reasons why the people were full of unbelief.

Jesus: teaching and healing in the unction and power of the Holy Spirit

'And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?' Mark 6.2.

Connected with this event is the account given in *Luke 4.18*.

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal

Unbelief in the Presence of Jesus

the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.'

Jesus clearly identifies Himself with the fulfilment of the words of the prophet Isaiah foretelling the Messiah, the Man Who would preach like no one had ever preached before. We read people were astonished, and marvelled at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth (*Luke 4.22*). Here was a Man Who taught with power, with authority.

Any true minister of the Gospel should have a measure of the unction of the Holy Spirit upon his ministry. This is an essential element, and without it his ministry will lack power, conviction, and fruit. But Jesus always had an abundant unction upon His ministry. This singled Him out as Someone different, an exceptional preacher. This is one of the reasons the scribes and Pharisees were so jealous of Jesus, for the people recognised a power in His ministry which was obviously lacking in theirs.

'...for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes' Matthew 7.29.

The question addressed by Mark in this account is how the religious leaders and people acknowledged the power, the wisdom, and the might of his ministry, and yet wilfully responded negatively to the message. There was a wall of unbelief. A congregation needs the Holy Spirit as they hear the message of God's Word. The Holy Spirit and preaching are in partnership.

'The hideous nature of unbelief

'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country,

The Gospel of Mark

and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching'
Mark 6.3-6.

The tenets of unbelief are evidenced here by:

a. Questioning God

'Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'
Genesis 3.1.

b. Ridicule

'And they laughed him to scorn. But when he had put them all out, he taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying'
Mark 5.40.

c. Scepticism

'Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof' 2 Kings 7.2.

d. Aggression

'Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?' Psalm 78.19.

e. Idle tales / Legend

'And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not' Luke 24.11.

Unbelief in the Presence of Jesus

The eternal end of unbelief

‘And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried’ Luke 16.22.

The folly of unbelief

One of France’s greatest thinkers, Voltaire, once said that in one hundred years’ time the Bible would be a forgotten book found only in museums. When the hundred years were up, Voltaire’s home was occupied by the Geneva Bible Society.

Consequences of unbelief

a. Loss

‘So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief’ Hebrews 3.19.

b. Judgment

‘And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil’ John 3.19.

‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life’ John 5.24.

In this event we can notice similar characteristics of this unbelief. When the people considered the Messenger, unbelief cast its cloud over their minds. This caused them to reject not only the message but also the Messenger. The question in their minds was, ‘How could it be possible for a carpenter to teach with such power?’ They knew where Jesus had come from, for they thought He was simply the son of Mary. The birth of the Lord Jesus of the virgin Mary, conceived of the Holy Spirit, was not recognised by them. Mary had kept all

The Gospel of Mark

these things and pondered them in her heart (*Luke 2.19*), but for the remainder He was just Jesus of Nazareth. It would appear his earthly father had died at this point and therefore He is referred to as the son of Mary.

There may have been a time also when even His brothers and sisters struggled to understand their Brother. Indeed, at one point the family came to fetch Him incorrectly thinking He was beside Himself. However, we know from Scripture that later James and Jude, His earthly brothers, became followers of Jesus. Jude wrote his letter and James became the leader of the early New Testament Church in Jerusalem. But at this point for most of Nazareth and among the religious leaders He was only a carpenter in their sight.

This is one of the great wonders of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ. Knowing He was the Son of God, He was willing to live in humility and relative obscurity and take up the trade of His earthly father. The word used here for carpenter has a wider meaning than the limitations we may put upon it. It meant that Jesus was a craftsman in the town of Nazareth. He was skilled in making things. He was the man you would call in to build, to repair, or to make something. By trade he was a skilled manual worker, from a poor working class background. He had not been to college; He was a working man, a layman, an ordinary man and the people despised Him. They looked down on Him in the same way that the unbelieving mourners at Jairus' house laughed at Him.

There is a great danger with this attitude in society. God gives people different gifts; some have intellectual, academic gifts, and some practical handiwork gifts. It is not good to despise and look down on a person who leaves school at sixteen to take up an apprenticeship. If this is how you think, you would be among those that despised Jesus as a tradesman. Despising those whose gifts lie practically rather than intellectually is a type of unbelief – God has gifted them.

Unbelief in the Presence of Jesus

Here the people allowed their prejudice to govern their mind. Unbelief clouded their judgment to the point of being offended by Him. Their opinions were challenged. As a result they and their town suffered the terrible consequences of rejecting Jesus. We do not read of Him returning again to Nazareth.

Mark records in verse 5 that Jesus could not work there because of their unbelief. This does not in any way mean that God was weaker than man's unbelief; rather it shows that in the end man gets the desires of his heart. They rejected Jesus and God gave them what they wanted. Even today the town of Nazareth is one of the saddest towns on Earth in terms of deprivation and unrest.

The attitude of the people in His homeland hardened their hearts to the work of the Lord. The atmosphere was so negative that even gracious words made little impact. Ultimately, the responsibility for Jesus going away was wholly with the people. These people had set themselves to reject the message and the Messenger.

This account warns us of the terrible danger of unbelief. Remember Jesus always preached with the unction of the Holy Spirit, yet at the same time His message was rejected. Why was this? It was because the congregation was not concerned to hear with the unction of the Holy Spirit!

We read that Jesus marvelled and was amazed at their unbelief. Their unbelief was incredible in the face of such evidence. Twice we read of Jesus marvelling at a situation. The other occasion was when faith was not expected and yet it was evident.

'When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel' Matthew 8.10.

The Gospel of Mark

It is so important to trust and believe in the Word of God. The Lord Himself taught this in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Abraham's conversation with the rich man in hell gives us a stark warning (*Luke 16.19-31*).

20. SENT OUT BY JESUS CHRIST TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

Mark 6.7-29

The twelve disciples, now known as apostles, sent forth to preach the Gospel

‘And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; 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. And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them’ Mark 6.7-13.

The disciples were sent out to preach by the Lord Jesus, having been first shown His reception and rejection. *Mark 5* records accounts of great faith in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ witnessed by the disciples, but at the outset *Mark 6* reveals great unbelief in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ witnessed by the disciples. Before sending them out the Lord ensured the disciples were aware of the challenges. When a minister is sent out to preach the Gospel it is vital he understands there will be reception and rejection.

My next point is that the disciples were sent out to preach by the Lord Jesus Christ. Preaching is not something a man takes upon

The Gospel of Mark

himself, sending himself out to preach. A man does not apply for the post. God equips, burdens, compels and calls His ministers – the pastor, church leaders, and the church, recognise the gifting of God.

Nowadays the Lord sends out men to preach the Gospel in the context of the local church. The call by God to preach and his gifts to do so are recognised by the church first, and then he is sent out. In this way the authority and unique significance of preaching the Gospel is upheld. The midweek Bible Study is a helpful meeting at which such gifts to preach can be discerned and tested.

In this passage of Scripture we are given the account of Jesus sending out His disciples to preach. Their call was unique as they were called as apostles of Jesus Christ and given a preaching and healing ministry. This was the apostolic period, which continued after Christ's return to Heaven until the last apostle died.

By considering the accounts of their calling in all the *Gospels*, several principles are set for ministers.

- While they are not apostles sent personally by Jesus Christ on Earth, they are nevertheless sent by God. The apostles were called to preach by the Lord Jesus – He is our Master. He gave them power – Christ-centred power. He commanded them first to preach a Christ-centred ministry.
- They were to be dependent upon the providence of God in the ministry – He will provide. They were dependent upon hospitality, and, for stability, were to stay in the same house for the duration of their work in each place.
- They were to be supportive of one another – they went out two by two. Fellowship in ministry is vital. There is the pattern of partnership in ministry. Think of biblical examples: Peter and John, Paul and Silas, Barnabas and Mark, Paul and Timothy. This is why in churches God ordains a pastor and a co-pastor or assistant pastor to work together.

Sent Out by Jesus Christ to Preach the Gospel

- Jesus sent them out among wolves. That means that the devil will use people to attack the ministry of the Gospel.

*'Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves'
Matthew 10.16.*

- A minister's attitude is important. He must be dependent on God for all material and spiritual needs, and give himself wholly to the work. He should beware of those who would oppose and be aware and wise about their methods in opposition.
- A minister will be persecuted – it is part of the call. The apostles were to be brought before the authorities for the sake of Jesus Christ. The Lord will uphold His servants at such a time, giving right words to speak by the Spirit. A minister will be hated for Christ's sake.

'And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved' Matthew 10.22.

He is to press on and remember the persecution is first directed at the Lord. Men hate Him and will hate His servants because of Him. He is not to fear man but God, and remember the awesome authority of God. He is cared for by his heavenly Father, which is a comfort.

Important principles are:

- a. Take up your cross – follow the Lord and Master, Jesus Christ;
- b. Lose your life for Christ's sake – it is a call for life;
- c. The kingdom of Heaven is at hand – there is an urgent need for the life-changing, eternal message of the Gospel;
- d. Have dependence upon the Holy Spirit – He alone has the power to bless;
- e. Follow the pathway of your Master, Jesus Christ – understand the nature of the call;
- f. Preach the Gospel – fear God, not man;
- g. You are blessed if you confess your faith in Christ before men – it is a privileged calling.

The Gospel of Mark

All these principles are collated from the Gospel accounts of the call of Jesus Christ of the apostles to ministry.

Note they were commissioned first and foremost to travel to places and preach the message of the Gospel. Preaching is the earnest proclamation of news initiated by God. Commissioned by the Son of God, they exhorted men and women to repent of their sin and turn to God.

The word 'repent' here has the wider meaning to include the preaching of the Gospel to repentance and faith. It means preaching for the conversion of souls from darkness to light; for people to have a true sorrow over their sin, with an earnest resolution with God's help to break from the past life of rebellion; for people to experience a true change of heart, lifestyle, and direction, and to submit in love to God Who loved them first.

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised' Luke 4.18.

'And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where' Luke 9.6.

'Believe the Gospel'. What is the Gospel? The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, defines it perfectly in *1 Corinthians 15.1-4*:

'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.'

Sent Out by Jesus Christ to Preach the Gospel

Secondly, Christ commanded the apostles to heal the sick. This was the Gospel in word and action. Together with the preaching, the compassionate ministry of healing with signs and wonders added authority to their calling. This healing aspect of their calling was for a particular period of time, establishing the message of the Gospel. God still heals miraculously in His sovereign goodness. But the regular spontaneous nature of the miracles in the Apostolic period, with accompanying signs and wonders, God clearly intended for that establishing time.

The issue of belief or unbelief is made the centrepiece of the reception of the Gospel message. The responsibility of receiving both the messengers and the message was with the people. There was the responsibility of hospitality and the responsibility of responding to the Gospel wholeheartedly. Jesus says something extremely solemn and challenging to those who come under the sound of the Gospel:

‘And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city’ Matthew 10.14-15.

By contrast, please remember the Word of God promises joy and peace in believing, and the prospect of being right with God.

The call to preach

Preachers are called by God and sent out to preach by the local church under the supreme authority of Christ. They have a unique role in the world, being commissioned by Christ, and are ambassadors of Christ. They are called to preach the Gospel from the Word of God and are dependent upon the Holy Spirit of God. In accordance with the sovereign grace of God the Father, souls are saved through the ministry. We must keep the highest view of the ministry, while the minister must have a very humble view of himself. John said: *‘He*

The Gospel of Mark

must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3.30).

This thought brings us to the next section of our verses relating to the sad execution of John the Baptist.

Pride set against humility: the voice of the conscience troubling Herod

'And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him. Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.

'For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife. Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly' Mark 6.14-20.

We might see this event as Satan's battle of pride against humility. Herod had visited Rome and was given hospitality by his rich brother Philip. During his stay Herod stole his brother Philip's wife, and brought her back to Jerusalem. God spoke to him through His servant John the Baptist and warned him of his evil ways. John the Baptist, the faithful servant of God, admonished Herod for taking Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Light shone on Herod's conscience; he was without excuse. But Herod responded by putting John the Baptist in prison in the fortress of Machaerus.

Machaerus stood on a lonely ridge overlooking the east side of the Dead Sea. It was one of the loneliest, grimmest, and most unassailable fortresses in the whole world. It was in this bleak and desolate

Sent Out by Jesus Christ to Preach the Gospel

fortress God's servant was imprisoned for his faithfulness.

Set against this persecution is the voice of the Word of God troubling Herod's conscience. He understood that John the Baptist was a righteous and holy man consecrated to God's service, and respected among the people as a prophet. He also knew John the Baptist was a faithful preacher who exhorted men and women to repent. He himself knew right from wrong and his conscience accused him under the solemn reproof of John. Despite all this, to pacify Herodias and for her sake, he had John put in prison where he was out of the way but not out of his conscience. So he applied his own salve to his conscience by telling himself he was protecting John, for included in the term for his imprisonment is the meaning of John being hidden away. So on the one side he was heeding the voice of Herodias (John was imprisoned), and on the other side he rationalised his action by telling himself he was hiding John away.

Herod visited John in prison to hear him, attempting to settle his troubled conscience. He had heard John gladly, which means with respect to his faithful exposition of the Word of God. Herod made a number of outward signs evidencing appreciation for the Word preached by John, but at the same time he was never truly touched in his heart and was left greatly perplexed.

'And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; and when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist.

The Gospel of Mark

And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother. And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb' Mark 6.21-29.

John's faithfulness caused terrible hatred and resentment from Herodias to the point of wishing to destroy John. Prison was not enough for Herodias: she so hated John the Baptist that she wanted him completely destroyed. She seized her opportunity when at a debauched party Herod made a rash promise in his drunken state. When her daughter asked her mother what to ask of Herod, John's head was demanded. Herod's foolish promise resulted in executing John. In the end such an action was taken by Herod rather than humble himself before God and stand up to Herodias.

From this passage we can see some of the real dangers of pride that cause a person to exalt themselves. Pride causes division against the truth (v19). Herod respected John in his mind as a holy man, even hearing him gladly, but only responded in his mind to John's message. In the end pride won the day because Herod's heart had never been truly changed or converted. Herodias tricked him into executing John and though he was very sorry, nevertheless his pride overcame him. His name, reputation, and need to save face because of his unwise promise overwhelmed the call to humility (verse 26).

Here the Lord's servant was destroyed for his faithfulness because Herod was too proud to back down. The oath he had made could have been revoked in Jewish law at the time as it involved death. But Herod looked around him at his drunken friends and Herodias, but did not look within. So it was that Herod's pride overcame his conscience. God's servant was killed and taken out of the way.

Sent Out by Jesus Christ to Preach the Gospel

We have here the tragedy of pride resisting humility – reputation not repentance – the danger in life of saving face before man rather than humbling one’s face before God. This is an extreme example but in measure we all have this tendency by nature to act in this way. For Herod to back down and acknowledge the error in his behaviour and rash promise meant losing his reputation before Herodias and his friends around him (verse 26).

Conclusion

The preaching of the Gospel is ordained by God. The reception of the Gospel is dependent upon God’s sovereign grace touching our hearts. Our biggest problem and barrier to the Gospel working in our life is pride. It was manifest horribly in the life of Herod, but is a problem in measure that resides in each one of us. It can only be conquered in Christ under the power of the Gospel of God. We know when it is being dealt with in our lives only when, as the hymn writer said:

*When, nothing in themselves, they see
That Christ is all in all.*

Joseph Hart, 1712-68

The vital issue in ministry is the glory of God not man, and to serve Him with a sincere heart and mind.

21. THE COMPASSION OF JESUS

Mark 6.30-44

In this passage of Scripture the Lord Jesus shows compassion both for His disciples and His congregation. As the understanding Shepherd He knows our needs and He knows just how to deal with us at all times. The compassion of Jesus on Earth provides assurance of His ongoing compassionate intercession in Heaven.

Compassion for His servants: a time to rest

‘And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat’ Mark 6.30-31.

The apostles returned from their evangelistic missions to meet again with their Lord and Master Jesus Christ. What is remarkable is how they all came back at the same time with the same desire to meet their Master. It is probable the Lord had set them a time to return and meet Him, so we find them all together again.

They reported back to the Lord all that they had done and what they had taught. They understood that in the ministry of the Word of God doctrine and practice go hand-in-hand together. Having returned to Him with their reports, the Lord discerned the apostles were weary and needed rest, so in His wisdom and compassion He led them away privately for a time of rest, reflection and fellowship.

They had earned a rest; they had worked hard and had been honourable in their commitment to the call. While it is right and proper to respect hard work and dedication, it is also right and proper to respect rest. God rested from His labours on the seventh day after His wonderful work of Creation. C H Spurgeon described appropriate

The Gospel of Mark

rest as 'holy inaction' – consecrated leisure. Here the Lord Jesus commands a period of retirement, rest, and relaxation, choosing to go to a deserted place. From this we learn that doing what is necessary for our spiritual and physical wellbeing is part of serving the Lord.

The same need is apparent even in the secular working world. Great importance is placed on maintaining aircraft and the rail network. Bad maintenance can result in a dangerous situations. So neglecting physical and spiritual maintenance can result in damaged ministry.

'And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him' Mark 6.32-33.

In this case the Lord takes His apostles by ship privately into a secluded, quiet and peaceful location. It was not long, however, before their quiet time was interrupted. When Mark writes the people 'outwent' them, he means they followed too and observed their final location. In fact on occasions, while they were running around the lake on foot, they were ahead of Jesus in the boat. This reminds us of a blessed desire to see Jesus and hear from Him, a God-given desire to hear the Gospel. But considering the other Gospel accounts it is clear Jesus and His disciples settled first in the resting place, for it was from this resting place Jesus came out and observed the crowd coming to Him.

'And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him...' John 6.3-5.

I believe what happened here was that Jesus worked, taught and healed, while the disciples rested. We read that it was only after the day was far spent His disciples came and told Him to send them away.

The Compassion of Jesus

So the Lord honoured His command to the disciples to rest, while He took the burden of ministry Himself. Nevertheless there must have been disappointment for the disciples in not having Jesus to themselves. We know they had just received the news of the execution of John the Baptist, and no doubt they had questions. I am sure there were mixed emotions in their coming to Jesus at the end of the day and suggesting that He send the people away!

But even at the end of a long day the Lord Jesus maintained and continued His ministry of compassion. He showed compassion for the spiritual and physical needs of the people. This is the Gospel of God in action.

Compassion for His congregation's spiritual need: a time to teach

'And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things'
Mark 6.34.

The word 'compassion' here has the meaning of Jesus being deeply moved in His spirit towards the multitude. But what moved the Lord Jesus most of all as He observed the people coming to Him? They had no one who really cared for their soul; they had no teacher who taught them from the Word of God. So at the outset it was the need of their souls that deeply moved Jesus. It was the fact that spiritually the multitude of people were as sheep without a shepherd. Sheep without a caring shepherd lack proper direction; they are vulnerable and in danger. Sheep without a caring shepherd's guidance often struggle to find good pasture and eat what is bad for them; they also have little defence against attack.

As Jesus looked on this vast multitude coming towards Him, He understood perfectly their spiritual need. He knew the religious leaders had no real care and concern for the people spiritually. He knew their political leader, Herod, had no real care for those under his practical

The Gospel of Mark

care, so here, as the Good Shepherd, He reached out in love and compassion and spiritual care to the multitude.

I would like to notice how the Lord addressed such a need, such a lack of spiritual care: He taught them many things. What a day this was! The Lord taught the people the truth of the Word of God. He taught them the truth about God, about Himself, about themselves, and about the Gospel of salvation. It was a day of truth from the Person of truth, the Way of truth, the Light of truth. The deep compassion of Jesus the Lord brought forth the fruit of His teaching ministry. His pastoral heart motivated Him to teach the truth. We are reminded again of the importance of preaching. His great love for them manifested itself in teaching. This was how Jesus ministered to thousands of unconverted people – He taught the truth of the Word of God.

Compassion for His congregation's physical need: a time to eat

'And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat. He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat? He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes. And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties. And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes. And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men' Mark 6.35-44.

The Compassion of Jesus

During the day Luke's account tells us that Jesus also healed those who had need of healing. He was not unmindful or unconcerned about their physical needs. The compassion of the Lord Jesus is firstly spiritual but it also extends to our physical needs.

At the end of the day the disciples also discerned the physical needs of the people. Humanly speaking the situation was impossible; there was no food for such a vast multitude in the wilderness. It seemed the only way was to send them away to many villages to buy bread, for the crowd had nothing to eat. However their approach is in contrast to that of Jesus. Their approach is to send them away; Jesus said, 'You give them something to eat.'

Sometimes our approach can be like the disciples in far smaller situations than they were dealing with. 'Send them away to fend for themselves; send them away to look after themselves; out of sight out of mind.' There are times in our experience, when facing impossible situations, that the obvious answer seems to be, 'Send them away.' But that is to deal with the situation without faith in the presence and power of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

At this point in this event, remember Jesus the Son of God was on the scene full of compassion. He had already taught and healed throughout the day. In a way the disciples coming to Jesus, telling Him to send them away, showed doubt for His care for the multitude. It assumed that Jesus was unmindful of a potential logistical crisis concerning food for the multitude. Could it be possible that the Good Shepherd, having spent all day labouring, should send them away empty? No!

The Lord Jesus teaches us here that the Gospel is to be ministered as Word and practice in action together. He knew exactly what He was doing in this situation, for arising out of the need would be a most glorious miracle. So Jesus commences the way to the miracle by telling the disciples to provide food for the multitude.

The Gospel of Mark

To feed this multitude would cost two hundred pennyworth, or two hundred days wages at the time, around £10,000 today. We know there was a crowd in excess of five thousand. The lad's lunch box contained five loaves and two small fish. Imagine going down to the supermarket and buying 25,000 loaves and 10,000 fish fingers to take away! Naturally speaking the situation was impossible.

Now Jesus knew exactly what He was doing and no doubt told the disciples to give the crowd something to eat to test them. In the *Gospel of John* we read that Jesus had a particularly testing question for Philip.

'When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do' John 6.5-6.

But Jesus knew what He would do. What a comfort that is, when facing impossible situations like the disciples did. These impossible situations we face in God's permissive will remind us of our inability and weakness. But here we are reminded that Jesus knew what He would do.

We are particularly considering the compassion of Jesus, both spiritually and providentially. The miracle of the feeding of the multitude is a picture for us of Jesus Christ as the Bread of spiritual life. But it is also a picture of the compassionate ministry of Jesus and how He engaged His disciples in it.

I would like us to consider the engagement of the disciples in compassionate ministry in the name of Jesus. There are many helpful lessons for us as we serve the Lord in this miracle of the compassionate power of Jesus.

a. Obedience and faith

They obeyed the command of Jesus stepping out in faith, instructing the people to sit down in readiness to eat. For all the questions

The Compassion of Jesus

the disciples had beforehand, now they obey wholeheartedly showing incredible belief. When Jesus commanded they responded to Him even though they did not know how the food would come. I wonder also what the crowd thought of such a development in a place where there was no food to speak of. Why bother? Because the Master says so! The Master who has been teaching you can be trusted. He will not deceive you, only provide for you. Step out in obedience and faith in compassion.

b. Order and organisation

God is the God of order, not confusion, and this is reflected here in compassionate ministry. Before the distribution there must be order. This was not survival of the fittest, or a matter of being first in the queue, but of impartial giving. Orderly groups in rows sitting down on the green grass were all dependent upon the Son of God, Jesus, to provide. We see this orderly organisation in the testimony of Nehemiah too. God is a God of order.

At the conclusion of the meal, when all had eaten sufficiently and were filled, the remnants were collected. Twelve disciples distributed the food, and twelve baskets were filled with the leftovers. All was done decently and in order.

c. Provision

God often chooses to work through little things, insignificant things, through weak things. So the question is put about the loaves and fishes: *‘What are they among so many?’* (John 6.9). Sometimes we may get downhearted about our weakness and say, ‘What good am I doing in this situation? What is the point? I am making little impact. What are we among so many?’

Sir Michael Costa was once conducting a rehearsal in which the orchestra was joined by a large choir singing a chorus. About halfway through the session, with trumpets blaring, drum rolling and violins bringing forth their rich melody, the piccolo player muttered to

The Gospel of Mark

himself, ‘What good am I doing? I might as well not be playing. Nobody can hear me anyway.’ So he kept his instrument to his mouth but he made no sound, just pretending to play. After a short while the conductor cried, ‘Stop! Where’s the piccolo?’ It was missed by the most important person of all, the conductor.

It can be the same for Christians. Like the disciples with the lad’s loaves and fishes we say, ‘What are we among so many?’ We can lose heart and resort to pretending to serve. But remember; the Conductor knows what we are doing. Our service is important to Him as part of the orchestra of Gospel ministry.

The secret of the miracle was when the loaves and fishes got into the Master’s hands, when they were handed over to Him. We are not told how this miracle was performed but we do know the loaves and fishes were given to Jesus. He broke the bread and divided the fish. In His hands the little meal for one became a fulfilling meal for many. The Creator created; the Creator provided. He is the One Who made the difference.

We learn from this not to despise the provision but by faith to put the provision in the hands of Jesus in prayer. It is amazing what the Lord can do with just a little.

The testimony of the young boy

a. He was in the right place

Those of you who are younger may think it a strange way of spending the day, in the wilderness listening to a long sermon. How much more interesting to be at home with your friends! Nevertheless it actually proved to be the best place for this boy and, in addition, his gift is remembered for all time.

b. He had the right attitude

We have a lad here with five loaves and two small fishes. Jesus wanted them: ‘Bring them to Me.’ We do not read of a struggle in the

The Compassion of Jesus

lad giving his own food to Jesus. He gave all that he had to the Lord Jesus. What he had was insignificant by man's standards. Matthew tells us in his account of this event:

'And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes' Matthew 14.17.

They seemed nothing really, but Jesus said, 'Bring them to Me.' May these words of instruction come home to us. 'I am not very talented, Lord; I am not very gifted, Lord', but bring what you have to the Lord, be it only a little. It is only when our lives are in the Lord's hands by faith that the spiritual blessing will be realised. Have faith in the Lord Jesus: He can make a little go a long way. Man may despise our smallness but Jesus will not. We may only have one talent with grace in the Lord's hands, but it is worth far more than twenty talents without grace out of the Lord's hands. Before conversion we live for self, but when we follow Jesus our all is in His hands. Jesus, like with the loaves and fishes, will multiply spiritual blessing as we truly trust in Him. Christian service brings what we have to Christ in obedience.

'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service' Romans 12.1.

When C H Spurgeon started preaching at New Park Street in London he said, 'I am just a small country preacher', but the Lord greatly used him.

Christian service, trusting in the Lord, is by God's grace in the heart.

'For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ' 2 Peter 1.8.

Thanksgiving

We have here an important aspect to this event in relation to the compassionate ministry of Christ. He is setting an example not only

The Gospel of Mark

to the disciples but also to the multitude. All four *Gospels* record the way in which Jesus gave thanks to His Father for the food set before them. Five loaves and two fishes in front of thousands of people, yet Jesus gave thanks.

'Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks' John 6.23.

He gave thanks before the meal, demonstrating to the crowd both thanksgiving and confidence in His heavenly Father to provide for the multitude through Him and to work out His perfect will.

*Have faith in God, my heart,
Trust and be unafraid:
God will fulfil in every part
Each promise He has made.*

Bryn Austin Rees, 1911-83

Look to the Lord Jesus and know your heavenly Father's care provided in Him.

'The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly' John 10.10.

'For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me' 1 Corinthians 11.23-24.

Satisfaction

All their needs were met in Christ Jesus. They all ate and were abundantly filled. This is a picture of the spiritual riches in Christ the Bread of Life.

The Compassion of Jesus

Conclusion

- a. Obedience and faith – just follow the Master;
- b. Order and Organisation – God is a God of order;
- c. Provision – Jesus can work with insignificant things and insignificant people;
- d. Thanksgiving – is a vital part of our worship in service;
- e. Satisfaction – any compassionate ministry for the Lord only finds its fulfilment in Christ.

22. THE MASTER IS IN COMPLETE CONTROL

Mark 6.45-56

The direction of Jesus

'And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people' Mark 6.45.

Immediately following the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand He sends the people away, while the disciples are instructed definitely by Jesus to go before Him in a boat to the other side of the lake. The word used in the original means He strongly urged the disciples. Now we may ask, why did Jesus send the disciples on the lake knowing full well that a storm was brewing?

- He knew that through this experience He would reveal Himself to them in a deeper way;
- He was teaching them how He was willing to come to them in their need;
- He was showing them how He was in complete control over Creation;
- He was teaching them that obedience and faith in Him cannot be separated;
- He was teaching them to trust and appreciate Jesus for Who He is, the Son of God.

In His understanding ministry Jesus constrained, or made, His disciples get into the boat. Jesus, as the Son of God, in His deity knew what lay ahead of His disciples. The disciples obeyed their Master; they did what was right. They followed His direction, got into the boat, set sail and ran into a storm. But what are we to make of this?

The Gospel of Mark

In addressing this question it is important to note that there are different types of trials which God allows. One is the corrective trial which comes when we disobey God, like Jonah of old, and have to be brought back on track.

'Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby' Hebrews 12.11.

Another type of trial is given to deepen our testimony and witness. It may be particularly distressing, but through it we experience God's dealings and comfort. This enables us to minister to others whom we meet who are passing through similar experiences. This type of trial is given to people who will be a blessing to others through what they have learned.

'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God' 2 Corinthians 1.3-4.

A third type of trial can be described as a perfecting trial. This type of trial comes to deepen our faith when being oppressed by hardness and unbelief. The events we are considering fit within this type of trial.

The disciples had obeyed Jesus and they ran into a storm. Their obedience was good, but their faith in that obedience needed perfecting. Their faith in Jesus as the Son of God needed deepening doctrinally for, despite the miracle of the loaves and fishes, their hearts had remained hardened on this issue. In fact Mark tells us they struggled with hardness of hearts. They had not properly considered and taken in Christ's deity shown by the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Maybe the shock of the storm and the fear they experienced now contributed

The Master is in Complete Control

also to their state of mind. But, positively, Matthew tells us that, after the stilling of the waves when Jesus got into the boat, they finally acknowledged that Jesus is the Son of God, amidst the struggle of their hardness of heart.

From this storm we see that problems in the Christian life must not always be viewed as God's discipline. Often they are simply permitted by God as the means He uses to perfect and deepen our faith. When Abraham was tested by God, being called to offer up his son Isaac, his faith was perfected. The outcome brought him to a deeper understanding regarding the coming Messiah. Jesus said: '*Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad*' (John 8.56).

In our own lives God does permit trials particularly to deepen faith in God, especially when a provision of God has passed by in our lives without due praise and reverence.

*Count your many blessings, name them one by one
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.*

Johnson Oatman, 1856-1922

The knowledge and intercession of Jesus

'And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them' Mark 6.46-48a.

Jesus was the Son of God and yet also the Son of Man. Here upon this Earth in His perfect humanity He valued the ministry of prayer above anything else in His life. Fellowship with His Father, with the Holy Spirit, was of paramount importance to Jesus. He could not live without it; He needed this fellowship; He needed time on His own with the Father. He demonstrated above all, that union with His Father was key to achieving His mission. Jesus spent much time in prayer. As Jesus valued and needed the fellowship of the Father in prayer so do we.

The Gospel of Mark

'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ'
1 John 1.1-3.

Here Jesus was on the mountain praying alone, and yet He could see the apostles out on the lake. When sending His disciples onto the lake Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen. He had a perfect understanding from start to finish of the events that night.

This is something we can be assured of. Jesus knows all that we are experiencing: times of temptation, affliction, danger, success, failure, weakness, sadness, or joy. He was not unmindful of their situation.

'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry' Psalm 34.15.

He knew their situation and was no doubt praying and interceding for them. The Lord's knowledge and intercession can be seen on other occasions:

- Simon Peter

'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me' Luke 22.31-34.

- the man at the pool of Bethesda

The Master is in Complete Control

‘When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?’ John 5.6.

‘Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them’ Hebrews 7.25.

The timing of Jesus

‘And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them. But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit, and cried out’ Mark 6.48-49.

It was now dark and Jesus had not come to them. They were on their own, the wind was strong, the waves were high, and the little boat was being tossed about. The timing of God is often a great mystery to us. Jesus intercedes and intervenes in our lives only according to the sovereign will and timing of His Father in Heaven. They are perfectly united in the purpose of doing the best for all who trust in them, and know exactly when to act.

The disciples in the boat were in darkness and danger and no doubt felt deserted. They knew their lives were in great danger; they knew their need of God to intervene in the situation. But in God’s perfect time Jesus came to them walking on the water, and when they cried out He said, *‘Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid’* (Matthew 14.27). *‘You are not forsaken; God is in control; all things will work out.’*

The care of Jesus

‘And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be

The Gospel of Mark

of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased' Matthew 14.25-32.

From the boat Peter saw a Person that looked like Jesus before him. He recognised His voice, but how could it be the real Man Jesus Christ walking on the water? 'Lord, if it be thou, bid me to come unto thee on the water.' Was this Man both God and Man, or just God in the form of an angel before him? 'Lord, if it be Thou, if it is the Lord Jesus I love there in the midst of this storm, the Lord Who first told me to get into this boat and go to the other side of the lake, command me then, as the Lord of my life, to come.'

At this point Peter was wholly taken up with Jesus – not the storm or the danger, only Jesus. He wanted to be with Jesus; he wanted more than anything to be at His side. To be with Jesus meant leaving the only possible human hope of safety from the storm, the boat. Jesus told Peter to come to Him. Jesus knew what was going to happen to Peter, but He still said come! Jesus does not call us to Him expecting us never to fail or to fear or to make mistakes. Jesus does not call us to Him expecting us to be perfect followers of Him. Peter would begin to sink with doubts and fears because of the waves as he was walking towards Him, but Jesus said, 'Come!' Jesus calls us to Him knowing our failures, but knowing He will teach us through failures. Jesus called Peter knowing He would have to save Him.

So it was that Peter stepped out of the boat in faith, looking unto Jesus. Peter had great faith to get out of the boat and go to Jesus. All

The Master is in Complete Control

the while he looked to Him, focused on Him, trusted in Him, and depended on Him, Peter walked. To be with Jesus meant casting all his care upon Him (*1 Peter 5.7*). To be with Jesus meant he had to keep his eyes on Jesus alone. Peter's problem came when he took his eyes off the Lord and looked around and considered the wind. The wind and its effect on the waves terrified him. Overwhelmed he began to sink.

Fear reduced big faith, trusting faith, dependent faith, to little faith. Nevertheless, from that crisis point of sinking we have an incredible short prayer of faith: '*Lord, save me.*' It was a brief prayer, but a very sound, very personal, and very urgent prayer. We can see again the care of Jesus in the way He dealt with Peter. When Peter cried out to Jesus, He was there ready to save!

Peter's prayer was brief, sound, personal, urgent, and effective. Notice here how Peter realises his utter dependence upon Jesus as he prayed – that was its effectiveness. Even though, as Jesus said, his faith had been reduced to little faith, it was still faith. Peter cried, '*Lord, save me – save me from drowning, save me from unbelief, save me from fear. Save me for Thy mercy's sake.*'

Peter's deliverance

Peter, in his imperfect way and condition, prayed to Jesus and the Lord stretched forth His hand to save. Jesus could have just said the word and Peter would have bounced up like a cork. But here, in His great mercy, the Lord assured Peter with His power and love (*Matthew 14.31*). After Jesus had saved him He gave His loving rebuke to Peter.

The difference Jesus makes in our lives

'And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened' Mark 6.51-52.

The Gospel of Mark

'And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God. And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret' Matthew 14.32-34.

'Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went' John 6.21.

The words of Jesus made a difference: *'It is I; be not afraid'*. He spoke with authority, with power, with conviction, and with comfort.

The presence of Jesus made a difference. When they willingly received Jesus into the boat, there was an immediate peace. The wind and the waves were quiet, and they arrived safely at their destination. The great turning point for the disciples was when they willingly received Jesus into their boat. We may be rowing hard against the waves of sin, temptation, suffering, or disappointment, but knowing Jesus and having Jesus in the boat of your life by faith makes the difference.

Jesus left the relative physical security of the mountain side to come to where the disciples were. He experienced for Himself the waves, the wind, and the darkness.

'But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea' Matthew 14.24-25.

'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' Hebrews 4.15.

Is this not a picture of the way Jesus came upon this Earth to save sinners? As Jesus looked down from the mountain side at the disciples rowing in their little boat in great danger, Jesus also looked down from Heaven to Earth at the great and terrible plight of man. He left the security, peace and quietness of Heaven and came to this Earth to identify with man's need, to seek and to save that which was lost, to

The Master is in Complete Control

suffer and die and rise again. He came to save; He came to comfort; He came to deliver; He came to show power.

Remember also when Jesus came to the disciples He brought words of comfort: *'It is I; be not afraid'*. Why do these words mean comfort and assurance to the believer? Why do they make the difference from fear to peace in a trial? Because of Who it is who spoke the words, the almighty Son of God!

'It is I.' If we believe in Jesus we can say:

- Be not afraid of the darkness. Jesus said, *'I am the light of the world'* (John 8.12);
- Be not afraid of your sins. Jesus says, *'I am thy salvation'* (see Psalm 35.3).
- Be not afraid of death. Jesus said, *'I am the...life'* (John 11.25).

What a difference Jesus makes! Without Jesus the disciples were not going to make it to the shore. Without Jesus in our lives we are not going to make it to the heavenly shore. Without Jesus in our lives we cannot hope to overcome the waves of sin, temptation, and unbelief. With Jesus in the boat fear is replaced with peace, and the desired habitation will be reached.

'It is I; be not afraid'. Jesus is not a ghost; He is a real Man. The disciples thought at first He was a ghost, but no! It was Jesus, most surely Man and most surely God.

*'Tis no wild fancy of our brains,
No metaphor we speak:
The same dear Man in heaven now reigns,
That suffered for our sake.*

The Gospel of Mark

*This wondrous Man of whom we tell
Is true Almighty God.
He brought our souls from death and hell,
The price, His owns heart's blood.*

Joseph Hart, 1712-68

Conclusion

The problem for the disciples in the storm was that they had not yet fully grasped Who Jesus really was. They had not fully understood or properly considered the implications of the miracle of the loaves and fishes. This amazing miracle was in danger of being lost not only on the multitude but also on the disciples of Jesus. Their faith needed perfecting. Their hearts, we are told, were hardened.

What did they need to realise for sure? The answer is found in the conclusion of this amazing event recorded in *Matthew 14.33*.

*'Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him,
saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.'*

Jesus revealed once again His deity to them as He walked on the sea. In the storm He perfected their faith so at the end of the trial they were more sure about Him. They had a better understanding of His deity than at the beginning of the trial. There was a plan being worked out; the time of testing was not a chance event but allowed under the permissive will of God. Jesus was as much the loving Shepherd when He made the disciples enter the boat as when He came to them in the boat.

Throughout the whole event Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was in perfect and complete control. The problem of the storm and of the trial served its purpose to reveal again the deity of Christ, to bring forth the fruit of believing finally in Jesus as the Son of God. The comfort in believing in Jesus comes as we appreciate Who Jesus is; a perfect Man Who is the Son of God.

23. JESUS DEALS WITH THE HEART

Mark 7.1-23

We are given a striking contrast between two different approaches made towards Jesus. The approach at the close of the previous chapter describes many people flocking to Jesus for healing. They thronged Him and begged Him just to touch the hem of His garment. In great compassion the perfect Son of God allowed healing virtue to go out of Him. Through Him the sick and the needy found perfect healing.

‘And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole’ Mark 6.54-56.

This incredible event reveals the completeness of the work of Jesus Christ in their healing. Interestingly for us, this points to the far greater healing of the soul which is required by each one of us, this being the complete and perfect cleansing of sin through the saving work of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross. Jesus showed amazing compassion to the needy who surrounded Him for physical healing, but His greatest, compassion is seen in His work upon the cross where He cared for man’s spiritual healing.

But now in *Mark 7* the approach made to Jesus involves a group of Pharisees and certain scribes. They come to Jesus to find fault. Jesus is going to converse with this other group of people who were not motivated by their need but by pride. As they looked for trouble they soon found what they thought was trouble in the behaviour of

The Gospel of Mark

the disciples. They observed the disciples eating without first going through a ritual ceremonial washing of their hands. It was not that the disciples were being unhygienic and eating with dirt on their hands. It means they had not washed their hands ceremonially according to the tradition of the elders. They had not washed them in the right manner, and in that context their hands were viewed as defiled.

The ceremonial, traditional manner was for a servant to pour water on the hands of the guest to the wrist, then repeat this by pouring water on the arm so the water ran down to the hands. The disciples probably had used a bowl of water and dried their hands on a towel just like the common people did. But according to the scribes' and Pharisees' tradition they were eating with defiled, unwashed hands because they did not have water poured over them in a special way. The tradition, the ceremony, the outward symbolism and show, was not there – the rules had been broken. So, not having prepared their hands according to the tradition of the elders, they found fault with some disciples. In their view the bread was now defiled and therefore, through this outward action, they were unclean before God.

Now this ceremonial washing ritual had become common also among many Jews as a cultural, religious tradition. Before any eating they must wash their hands in a particular manner, otherwise the hands and food were defiled. When they returned from the market they must have a bath and be immersed in water ceremonially as a ritual, for at the market they may have brushed the coat of a Gentile and be rendered unclean.

This ritual not only affected the body, but also all the washing of cups, pots and pans, and tables. They all must be washed in a certain manner according to the tradition of the elders otherwise they were defiled. The emphasis here is on the ceremony, the ritual, the amount and way of washing. Everything must be done a certain way. All the emphasis was on the outside. The scribes made the rules, and

Jesus Deals with the Heart

the Pharisees prided themselves in leading the way in keeping the rules for all to see.

Now these religious rulers hated Jesus and His disciples who followed Him as Lord of their life. Why?

- a. Because He and His disciples did not honour man-made rules and traditions. In fact by this time the scribes had introduced no less than six hundred and thirty one rules and regulations for behaviour.
- b. He associated with sinners.
- c. He claimed divinity because He was divine as the Son of God.
- d. Jesus made them feel uncomfortable. His humility compared with their pomposity; His sincerity compared with their hypocrisy; His sympathy compared with their cruelty; His unselfishness compared with their focus on self; His living for His Father's praise compared with their living for the praise of man.

A real problem was the insistence that their man-made rules were more important than God's rules. They laid stress on the outward appearance, the doing, the keeping of the rules, while ignoring their hearts. It was much simpler to be doing without paying attention to the heart. Of course, this problem continues to this day. There is in us an inbuilt natural resistance to examining the heart, so in this context of focusing on the outside while ignoring the heart, Jesus reveals to them their problem.

a. Hypocrisy

'He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men'
Mark 7.6-7.

This is to have insincere praise, with a heart far off from God. They honoured Him publicly with their lips, but all the while their hearts

The Gospel of Mark

were far off from God. Their hypocrisy was a wilful intent to present themselves in a different manner to what they really thought in the heart. They were only concerned with how they looked before men, the outward appearance.

The Pharisees prided themselves in living outwardly according to the regulations. They loved to be considered as righteous men.

'For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven' Matthew 5.20.

They, with the scribes, taught as vital, essential doctrine the commandments of men. The God-centred, holy commandments of the moral law were eclipsed in hundreds of man-made prohibitions and regulations. They considered their traditions higher than the Word of God, and so considered themselves wiser than God.

b. Traditionalism

'For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do' Mark 7.8.

They put to one side the commandment of God, holding the tradition of men. The scribes were responsible for interpreting the ceremonial law given through Moses. Not content to interpret the great moral principles contained according to Scripture, they insisted on and preferred strict regulation by rules. These rules became higher in their estimation than Scripture.

c. Rejection of God's commandments

'And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition' Mark 7.9.

They had more respect for their tradition than for God's commandments.

d. Their example

‘For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother’ Mark 7.10-12.

Jesus was attacking a system which put rules and regulations before the claims of human need. The commandment of God stated that human love should take priority. Jesus taught that any regulation which prevented anyone from giving help to those in need was a contradiction of God’s holy law.

We must be careful that we never allow rules to paralyse the claims of love. For example, here Jesus is speaking about the need we have to care particularly for our parents. As parents get older their children should ensure their welfare and provision. This biblical precedent can sometimes be forgotten in a secular society.

In Jesus’ day the religious leaders had introduced a system where a person could just say to his parent, ‘Corban’, meaning, ‘This is a gift’, releasing them from any obligation to use that money for their support. Hypocritically, that person would not give it as a gift to anyone else but use it as a gift for himself. Just saying the word ‘Corban’ did the job nicely. Selfishness ruled and the love and honouring of your parents was despised.

e. The effect

‘...making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye’ Mark 7.13.

Here is a devastating assessment of the serious effect of putting tradition and ceremony above God’s Word. It nullifies the effect of

The Gospel of Mark

God's Word in your life. This is the sad epitaph on the ministry of the scribes and Pharisees – dishonouring God's Word. It is at the heart of their ministry to depart from, rather than draw people to, the Word of God. Sadly this is the case in churches where the Word of God is ignored; it has become of no effect.

Jesus strikes at the heart of the matter

At this point, maybe the crowd were feeling self-satisfied as they heard reports about the Lord's attack on the Pharisees. Were not the scribes and Pharisees being shown up for their hypocrisy? As they looked on at a distance, the words of Jesus did not seem relevant to them, rebuking only the religious leaders. But now Jesus turns to all and addresses religious leaders and congregation alike.

a. It is a message for everyone

'And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand' Mark 7.14.

The problem is within the heart, for the heart motivates the lifestyle, actions, motives, desires, and attitudes. At the time of the Flood people's hearts were evil.

'And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' Genesis 6.5.

The seed in each one of our hearts by nature has the potential unchecked to produce such evil.

'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?' Jeremiah 17.9.

When Hitler was a little boy nobody expected him to turn out as he did. The potential seed of evil was in his heart. Sin affects our whole being; the problem is within.

Jesus Deals with the Heart

We may ask, does not sin come into our hearts in the form of temptation? Do we not imbibe sin when, for example, we read or watch immoral, violent actions on our computer or television? The question is, why are we interested in such things? Why do you succumb to the temptation? Because your indwelling sinful nature is open to sin, reaching out to further sin!

Sin is rather like this. How does a worm get inside an apple? Perhaps you think the worm burrows in from the outside. No; scientists have discovered that the worm comes from inside. But how does it get in there? Simple! An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats its way out. Sin, like the worm, begins in the heart and works out through a person's thoughts, words, and actions. This is called the Doctrine of Total Depravity, meaning our whole being is affected by sin. The psalmist David recognised this when he said he was born in sin and shapen in iniquity (*Psalm 51.5*).

What is the answer? We need a new heart.

'Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?' Ezekiel 18.31.

But how can we receive a new heart? Through confession and repentance.

'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit' Psalm 34.18.

We must pray for this.

'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me' Psalm 51.10.

We need faith in the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by

The Gospel of Mark

faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God' Romans 5.1-2.

This will affect our walk.

'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things' Matthew 12.34.

The disciples asked Jesus, when they had come apart from the crowd, to explain further. No doubt there was a steep learning curve for them as they had been used to such an emphasis on the outward. Indeed, that had been their own religion until Jesus came into their lives.

Jesus got straight to the heart of the matter: emphasis on the physical, the flesh, bypasses the heart, the spiritual. He then provided an example of the problem by nature residing in the heart.

b. The problem is the heart

'And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man' Mark 7.20-23.

- *Evil thoughts* – scheming to evil;
- *Adulteries* – including the lustful look at a person (*Matthew 5.28*);
- *Fornications* – all forms of immorality including pornography;
- *Murders* – to destroy one another, including a person's character;
- *Thefts* – secretly and with cowardly intent, like mugging a helpless old lady;
- *Covetousness* – to lust after more;
- *Wickedness* – a disposition which resents discipline and has no shame in wrong;

Jesus Deals with the Heart

- *Deceit* – trickery. An illustration of this would be the people of Troy besieged by the Greeks, receiving their gift of a wooden horse as if a token of goodwill. Inside were Greek soldiers who broke out in the night and dealt death and devastation.
- *Lasciviousness* – lewdness and uncontrolled immoral thinking;
- *An evil eye* – jealousy;
- *Blasphemy* – against God;
- *Pride* – haughty;
- *Foolishness* – senseless humour and actions.

All these evil things defile a man; there is a spiritual battle going on within, only overcome through Jesus Christ. The power of the blood of Jesus Christ the Lord is the answer to the sinful heart. Without the shedding of Christ's blood there is no remission of sins, no answer to the depravity of our hearts. The blood of Jesus Christ signifies His life and death at Calvary, and cleanses us from all sin (*1 John 1.7*).

'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot' 1 Peter 1.18-19.

The blood of Christ shall purge your conscience.

'How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?' Hebrews 9.14.

We have redemption through His blood.

'...in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins' Colossians 1.14.

We are made nigh unto God through the blood of Christ.

The Gospel of Mark

'But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ' Ephesians 2.13.

The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

*'...and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin'
1 John 1.7.*

We have access to God in prayer through the blood of Jesus Christ.

'Having therefore brethren boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus' Hebrews 10.19.

From eternity God has always ordained that the heart should be cleansed through the blood of Christ His Son, Who died at Calvary and rose again, victorious over sin and death and hell. So it is called the blood of the everlasting covenant wherein, in time, Christ died and rose again. In Heaven the blood of Jesus Christ will forever be the focus of praise and wonder.

'And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood' Revelation 1.5.

'And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation' Revelation 5.9.

'And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' Revelation 7.14.

'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death' Revelation 12.11.

Jesus Deals with the Heart

*What theme, my soul, shall best employ
Thy harp before thy God,
And make all heaven to ring with joy?
'Tis Jesus precious blood.*

Joseph Irons, 1785-1852

There is an answer to departure from relying on man's tradition and outward show; there is an answer to the problem of indwelling sin which Jesus teaches us here.

*Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.*

Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf, 1700-60

24. JESUS NURTURING FAITH

Mark 7.24-30

The message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ came first to the Jewish nation at Jerusalem and the land of Judea. If the Jews had received the Gospel by faith, they would have had the privilege to spread the message throughout the world. But as they mostly had rejected Jesus, His Gospel was spread throughout the world by Gentile preachers. It was in this context of giving the Gospel first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles, that this account is set.

‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek’ Romans 1.16.

Although primarily the ministry of Jesus while here on Earth was to the Jews, He did also heal some Gentiles. He did this to clearly demonstrate that the Gospel would indeed extend beyond the Jews and the land of Israel.

The event in this passage of Scripture took place outside the land of Israel. Here we have a Gentile woman who had a God-given faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. She came in great, yet humble, faith on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. The way Jesus handled this lady and situation helps us to understand some of the ways in which Jesus wisely nurtures, develops and strengthens faith. He responded to her faith, not to destroy it but to develop it. So the purpose of this miracle was to heal a mother’s sick daughter and also to develop this woman’s faith. We can see, additionally, the significance and profitable exercise in interceding on behalf our children.

Referring also to the account in *Matthew 15.21-28*, I will be taking this account from the viewpoint of how the woman’s faith was nurtured and deepened.

The Gospel of Mark

Seeking

'He could not be hid' Mark 7.24.

The passage of Scripture from *Mark 7.24* to *Mark 9.50* is a period known as Jesus' retirement ministry. At this time He was focusing His ministry on expounding to the disciples the lessons of Calvary. A considerable amount of time at this period was spent outside the land of Israel to avoid publicity. This reminds us that God's work and will continues, according to His wisdom, in public and private times.

What Peter learnt in the hidden times with Jesus prepared him, for example, for his amazing Pentecost sermon. There we read Peter profoundly reminding us of the preordained will of God overruling at Calvary. What he learnt in the secret place with Jesus later brought forth spiritual fruit in his public ministry. There was then this element of both private and public ministry in the example of the Lord Jesus.

In this verse we see Jesus was a perfect human being Who needed His quiet times for rest and reflection. This verse reminds us of His humanity and yet His total commitment to perform His Father's will, for even though Jesus took a break from public ministry for a while, it did not stop His one-to-one ministry.

There was a woman here with an urgent need, and in such a crisis situation the Lord will minister. So even though His physical and mental capacity needed 'time out', He was willing to be interrupted for a while. His perfect desire to do His Father's will allowed Him to be found, to be discovered. God's work continued. But such was the love of Christ He was ready to be disturbed. He could not be hidden from this lady in a crisis because His love for people and His Father's will would not allow it.

Now in harmony with His willingness was the woman's own concern to find the hidden Jesus. Jesus said elsewhere,

Jesus Nurturing Faith

‘...seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you’ Matthew 7.7.

For the woman the exercise of seeking out Jesus developed her faith. The struggle to find Jesus, and her persistence to find Him, showed her sincerity and the reality of her faith.

When you set out on a journey to meet a person at a certain place, there are often hold-ups, but the effort involved helps to prove your real desire to meet the person. When you meet that person they realise you really did want to see them because you have shown it through the trouble you have taken in getting to see them. You must have wanted to come.

So the Lord in His compassion remained ready to be interrupted and minister to this woman, knowing her sincerity and faith, and in obedience to His Father’s will.

Hearing

‘For a certain woman...heard of him’ Mark 7.25.

The Apostle Paul tells us that *‘faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God’ (Romans 10.17)*. Someone had told this woman about Jesus. The news of His mighty works had gone beyond the land of Israel. When she heard she believed the news, and she came to Jesus believing that He was the Messiah.

‘And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil’ Matthew 15.22.

She came with God-given faith that arose through hearing about Him as the Messiah. This reminds us of the importance of spreading the message about Jesus, otherwise, as Paul says, *‘How shall they hear without a preacher?’ (Romans 10.14)*.

But, of course, the message we preach about Jesus is important.

The Gospel of Mark

We live in a society where, in witnessing at certain places, we are not meant to say Jesus is the Son of God, the only way of salvation. So as a consequence the message is dumbed down and people are left with the impression that Christianity is just another religion alongside others of equal validity. But to preach Jesus without His deity as the Son of God is to actually preach another Jesus. Here this woman had no doubt in her mind Who Jesus really was – the Messiah.

Humility

‘...and came and fell at his feet’ Mark 7.25.

This woman’s approach speaks volumes about her faith. Her first action was to fall at His feet. How different is the contemporary approach: ‘I’ll give Jesus a try; I’ll give the “Jesus feeling” a try and see how it helps’; Jesus alongside other remedies and other religions to make you feel good about yourself. The problem is in the approach; it is back to front. There is no humility or repentance, and as a consequence no real living faith. Jesus is Lord, and we are needy sinners totally dependent upon Jesus Christ.

This woman knew little about Jesus, but enough to know He was Lord and that meant humility. Going on her knees helped her to realise and acknowledge Who Jesus really was.

‘Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith’ Habakkuk 2.4.

Persistence

‘...and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter’ Mark 7.26.

Faith is developed and exercised through persistence. Jesus told the story elsewhere of a person who knocked up his neighbour at midnight. He needed some loaves of bread to feed a guest who had arrived. The fact that the person kept asking his neighbour, *‘Friend, lend me three loaves’ (Luke 11.5)*, showed his heartfelt desire to look

after his guest. This lady really believed she had come to the right Person, a Person that was worth persisting with! Her faith was exercised through persistence.

Rejection

‘Send her away; for she crieth after us’ Matthew 15.23.

The disciples misunderstood the silence of Jesus when He did not answer the woman’s cries. They thought this woman was being a nuisance with her constant calling out. It disturbed them as well, for she was a Gentile woman, not a Jew. But this woman was not deterred by their discouragement. Jesus did not send her away without answering her need, but He did at the time remind the disciples that He was called first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

What did He mean by this? He meant that as far as His preaching ministry was concerned He was called to preach first to the Jews. The apostles, after His death and resurrection, and after the day of Pentecost, would preach to the Gentiles to show this truth and the way in which the Gospel would eventually cross all cultural and national boundaries.

Jesus did not send the woman away, but eventually ministered to her in His perfect wisdom and way. The initial silence of Jesus was not rejection; it was allowed to test her faith. The rejection of the disciples only activated a more earnest calling upon the Lord. In all things God was overruling.

Worship

‘Then came she and worshipped him’ Matthew 15.25.

Seeing the compassionate manner of Jesus Christ in not sending her away, she came and worshipped Him with her whole being. She worshipped Him as Lord; she knew she needed mercy. She knew He was the Son of David, the Messiah. In the end the exercise of her faith brought her to rely on one Person and one Person alone – Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The Gospel of Mark

Personal prayer

'Lord, help me' Matthew 15.25.

The circumstances and the way in which Jesus handled this situation brought forth its fruit in this short, heartfelt prayer. Now she was dealing with Jesus on a personal basis. We sometimes sing a hymn, 'God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform' (William Cowper, 1731-1800). God uses various ways, which sometimes seem mysterious to us, to bring us to this personal prayer in our life: 'Lord, help me.' He can use trials, sickness, conviction, responsibility, disappointments, hindrances, persecution, or temptation. It is a wonderful prayer, and one that is full of spiritual meaning to the soul. It shows utter dependence on the Lord.

Reality

'Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs' Mark 7.27.

The words of Jesus seem at first reading harsh and hard. However, there are some points which need to be remembered.

Firstly, Jesus was perfect and so the words were said in this manner for a purpose.

Secondly, Jesus uses the term 'dog', referring not to a wild scavenger but to a household pet.

Thirdly, we are not told the expression on the face of Jesus when He spoke these words, but it is likely to be one of loving compassion.

Fourthly, the words of Jesus explain the plan that the Jewish race were first to hear the Gospel. They would be witness to the glorious power of Christ first. That was the reality of the day in which this lady was living.

Hope

When we look at these words of Jesus we can see they give hope.

Jesus Nurturing Faith

Although the Jews are first in line the Gentiles are not precluded. The faith of this woman was such she saw this window of opportunity. Faith looks for windows of opportunity.

Reason

‘...yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs’ Mark 7.28.

Even if her position was likened to that of little house dogs, she reasoned that they entered into the blessing of the crumbs from the master’s table. This statement confirmed to Jesus the reality of this woman’s faith. It is a sign of a humble person when they do not take offence at what appear to be harsh statements. She continued to trust even when everything seemed against her. All the obstacles only made increased her persistence. She came to this point where she depended wholly on the mercy and grace of Jesus.

Trust

‘And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed’ Mark 7.29-30.

Another aspect to this woman’s faith which is sometimes overlooked is her obedience. She went back to her home on her own as Jesus had told her. Jesus had healed her daughter at a distance. The woman believed the words of Jesus and returned home to find her daughter lying on her bed.

It is interesting to note the town of Sidon is the same place that Paul stopped at on his way to Rome. There were friends of his there. I wonder if there is any connection with the ongoing witness of this family.

Conclusion

We have been considering various ways in which Jesus nurtured

The Gospel of Mark

and strengthened this woman's faith. Eventually this faith made a wonderful breakthrough and achieved its end.

- It was a faith which believed in Jesus Christ as the Messiah.
- It was a faith which understood her total dependence upon the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.
- It was a faith which would not let Jesus go until He had blessed her and answered her need.

*Trust Him when dark doubts assail thee,
Trust Him when thy strength is small,
Trust Him when to simply trust Him
Seems the hardest thing of all.*

*Trust Him; He is ever faithful,
Trust Him, for His will is best,
Trust Him, for the heart of Jesus
Is the only place of rest.*

Lucy A Bennett, 1850-1927

25. JESUS THE PERFECT COMMUNICATOR

Mark 7.31-37

As we consider the route Jesus took at this part of His ministry we can notice He went into areas that the Jewish religious establishment would not normally associate with. From Tyre and Sidon we find Him going through the region of Decapolis inhabited by Gentiles. This reminds us that God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than ours (*Isaiah 55.9*).

When the route Jesus took is viewed on a map we can see that by going via Tyre and Sidon, and then onto Decapolis arriving at the Sea of Galilee, He went in a circle and not the most direct route. From this we are reminded that God does not always take the shortest route in His purposes and direction. Sometimes there are unexpected routes and destinations in the journey of life which require patience.

There was a purpose for Jesus in taking this route. There is always a purpose with the ways of God. He walked this route to show that the Gospel was going to reach beyond the Jewish nation. Jesus also showed, by taking this route, that He was prepared to walk out of His way to heal. He demonstrated that wherever He walked it was with authority and purpose; this was not aimless meandering. On another occasion we read that Jesus '*must needs*' go on a certain route through Samaria (*John 4.4*), for there was a direct purpose to minister to a needy soul.

Jesus walking through the midst of the Decapolis region to the Sea of Galilee also demonstrates mercy. Previously Jesus had crossed the Sea of Galilee to heal and save a sick demonic man in Decapolis. Now Jesus is back in the same area again to personally heal and save another man, yet at the same time this was the very region from which,

The Gospel of Mark

at the first visit, the people had pleaded with Him to depart (see *Mark* 5.5-20). They could not cope with such a Man in their midst. But notice how He in His sovereign mercy was willing to come again. I wonder how much of a change the witness of the previously healed demonic man had made in that area. The healed man had gone back to his friends with a mission: to tell them what great things God had done for him and how the Lord had had compassion on him. This man had told his friends and no doubt his area of witness developed now he was healed in his mind, for now all types of people marvelled at his healing and testimony.

The caring Communicator

'And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened' Mark 7.32-34.

Previously the people in Decapolis had begged Him to go away. Now the people begged Him to put His hand on the sick man. This seemed the obvious way for him to be healed, but we must not dictate to God how He should handle a situation. God's ways are not our ways.

Jesus healed in a meaningful and personal manner. He entered into this man's silence through caring communication. Jesus was ministering to a man who could not hear, or speak clearly because of a speech impediment. As Jesus met this man He knew exactly how best to help him and handle him.

This account teaches us how vital is our manner of Gospel witness and communication. It requires thoughtfulness and it requires adaptability depending on the state and condition. At times the Lord Jesus, for the glory of God, spoke very severely; at other times very

Jesus the Perfect Communicator

compassionately. To those who should know the right way He was very firm. To those who did not know the right way He was very compassionate. We read of Him driving out the buyers and sellers in the temple with a whip (*John 2.15*); we read of Him rebuking Peter when he went beyond himself in speaking to Jesus.

‘But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men’ Matthew 16.23.

We read of Him on another occasion having a righteous anger with His disciples –

‘And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them’ Mark 10.13-16.

and with the religious leaders –

‘And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other’ Mark 3.1-5.

But looking on a congregation which had no sound teachers of the Word of God His approach was different:

The Gospel of Mark

‘But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd’ Matthew 9.36.

We need to seriously consider the condition and state of the person we are communicating with. The way Jesus dealt with the Syrophenician woman before this man differed, yet the purpose was the same. But He always dealt in meekness and in truth and with the person’s best spiritual and physical interest at heart. He cared wholeheartedly for the whole being of the person. There is one message always based on truth, but not only one way of communicating the message.

The considerate Communicator

‘And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue’ Mark 7.33.

Jesus took him aside. No doubt the man had fear; no doubt he may have felt threatened by the multitude of people all looking at him. But here was a Man Who understood and knew exactly how to minister to him according to his needs. When, through the ministry of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, Jesus is revealed to us it is like being taken out of the crowd and being spoken to personally by Jesus. It is just like being taken to one side, like this man, by Jesus to receive His personal one-to-one attention, for in the attention of Jesus, the caring Communicator, we are not a number but a person of value.

‘But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’ 1 Peter 2.9.

The clear Communicator

‘And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened’ Mark 7.33-34.

Jesus the Perfect Communicator

Jesus then took three actions with the man to communicate to him what He was going to do for him. He ministered as the Good Shepherd. Firstly, He touched his ear. He was telling this man through his touch sense, 'I am going to attend to the problem of your hearing.' Secondly, He spat and touched his tongue indicating, 'I am going to attend to the problem of your speech.' Thirdly, He looked up to Heaven: 'I am going to get help from My Father God in Heaven.'

We see the thoughtfulness of Jesus in the way in which He reached out to the needy. He showed that a deaf and virtually dumb person is not beyond God's healing power. He also demonstrated the need of flexibility in the way we should respond and treat people with different needs. This man was severely disabled but he could see and feel. Jesus communicated with him through touch and sight.

The compassionate Communicator

'And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened' Mark 7.34.

Jesus looked at this man and sympathised with his problems, sharing his sorrow. Looking up to Heaven in faith towards His heavenly Father as the Perfect Man, He sighed. He entered this man's suffering. Before His eyes was a sad example of spoiled creation. He had made the world perfect but sin had entered the world and spoiled it. He was now one-to-one with a man suffering physically from the effects of this Fall. Jesus was not closed in His heart to the needs of the world. He entered time and space and demonstrated compassionate concern for the needy.

He came alongside and sighed. Consider how grieved Jesus must have been to see first-hand His glorious creation marred. He saw it all around Him, physically and spiritually. He saw personally the effects of the Fall. He sighed over the Fall and went steadfastly to Jerusalem to provide a way of salvation. With a heart of steadfast love He went on to the cross to provide a way of redemption and restoration. We have

The Gospel of Mark

a merciful and understanding High Priest Who sympathises with our infirmities. In all our affliction He was afflicted and yet remained sinless in His Person.

The certain communication

He speaks with assurance in dependence upon his Father in Heaven, praying that this man will be given the freedom to speak and to hear: *'Be opened.'* This man was given immediate and complete healing. In addition he was given the immediate ability to speak clearly. The miracles of Jesus were certain.

How does Jesus communicate certainly with us now? He does so through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The Word of God is the only Book in the world which relies upon the Holy Spirit to communicate its message.

a. Jesus touched the man's ears. The Gospel comes by hearing, and preaching by the Word of God (*Romans 10.17*).

b. Jesus touched the man's lips. The Holy Spirit liberates our tongues to speak of Jesus Christ – a new language. When we are converted we speak words from the soul; we understand the spiritual language of the soul – the Word. God opens our mouth and gives us a new spiritual language with which to communicate.

Conclusion

Jesus told the people not to make this miracle public, but the more He commanded the more they disobeyed. They were determined to promote Him as a healer despite His continual guidance not to do so at this time. On the one hand they said, *'He hath done all things well'* (verse 37); on the other hand they constantly disobeyed Jesus. In the end obedience is the best test of true worship.

'If ye love me, keep my commandments' John 14.15.

They clearly disobeyed the wishes of Jesus in making these miracles public in such a manner. *'He hath done all things well'* was indeed a

Jesus the Perfect Communicator

true statement of praise and was good as far as it went. But in reality *'He hath done all things well'* in their thinking was limited to His healing miracle ministry. Jesus came chiefly to be the Saviour of sinners, and this vital point was being lost on the multitude. Jesus knew that to praise His name in such a limited way was placing the focus on the wrong point. The 'all things' for them did not include the soul; for them 'all things' was only the physical, the material.

The text on my calendar recently was, *'Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you'* (1 Peter 5.7). Does this care of yours include the soul?

When the two brothers met after many years Esau said he had enough; he was satisfied with the material. Jacob said he had enough, but he meant spiritually and materially (see *Genesis 33.8-11*). The wonderful works of God include the spiritual and the material. We are reminded of this when God had created this world:

'And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' *Genesis 1.31.*

Now God made that statement after He had completed His creation culminating in His creation of man and woman. Both were given physical and spiritual life, body and soul. The miracle we have been considering serves to remind us of a great spiritual truth. What Jesus did for this man physically He can do for us spiritually. When the world was created, the physical and the spiritual were perfect. Adam and Eve lived perfect physical and spiritual lives. All this was made possible through the creative work of Jesus Christ the Lord. When the Fall came both the physical and the spiritual were affected and marred. Therefore we must look to the same Creator, Jesus Christ, for restoration and reconciliation.

For example, when your washing machine goes wrong it is the manufacturer who replaces or provides the parts to repair it. In the handbook we see the words, 'refer to the manufacturer'. It would be

The Gospel of Mark

pointless going to another manufacturer to repair your machine. So it is with God; people know they need repairing, but they are not going back to the Person Who made them.

The greatest healing miracle comes as a result of the Son of God made Man giving His life on Calvary's cross, then rising again on the third day and ascending back to Heaven, ever living to intercede for us. This salvation brings the greatest healing of all – the healing of the soul. Two statements of praise were heard in Decapolis. The demonic man who was healed previously went back to his friends and said what great things God had done for him, and that He had had compassion on him. Now secondly here is a statement of praise: *'He hath done all things well.'*

The question for us today is, 'To what extent and way do we believe Jesus has done all things well?' So much depends upon what we mean in our hearts when we praise God in worship and how much we understand. How great for us are the great things that God has done? If we say, *'He hath done all things well'*, how far does that praise extend in our thinking? Have we made the great step of faith to see that the great 'all things' of God includes what God can do for our soul? Or is the God we worship limited only to a God of providence, to provide and protect materially alone?

The great 'all things' of God are practical and spiritual. The greatest work of all is salvation. We can sing from our heart to the glory of God that Jesus His Son has most assuredly done all things well. He has lived a perfect life; He has fulfilled God's law; He has fully satisfied God's justice on the cross; He has provided the atonement for sinners, and made a way to Heaven; and He intercedes in Glory for sinners. What great things Jesus has done for sinners who repent of their sin and trust in Him! He sent the Holy Spirit to work in people's lives enabling them to sincerely repent and believe.

26. ASSESSMENTS TAKEN IN UNBELIEF – ANSWERED BY JESUS

Mark 8.1-21

This passage of Scripture gives an account of three situations being assessed. Sadly each assessment is made upon the basis of unbelief, but each one is subsequently dealt with by Jesus. These three examples should lead us to ask ourselves, ‘How do I assess situations in my life? Am I basing my assessments in belief or unbelief?’

First, in the context of these verses, we must ask ourselves what is our own assessment of Jesus Christ. Where we are on this will fundamentally affect the way we make all our assessments in life. How much of our decision-making and attitude is taken in fellowship with Jesus Christ or with Him in mind?

Years ago there were wrist bands sold with the letters ‘WWJD’ on them, meaning ‘What would Jesus do?’ The idea was to remind the wearer to make assessments and decisions in a Christ-like manner. The direction we take, the decisions we make, and the attitude we have in life depend firstly on where we are in our relationship with God. We must examine the foundations, the innermost part of our being – Do we believe in God? Do we trust alone in His Son Jesus as Saviour and Lord, as the Son of God? The answers to these questions will govern the way we decide matters and make all our assessments.

We will examine three examples of unbelief – scepticism, incredulity, and ignorance. There is a common thread of unbelief within these three examples and events. In the end the accounts have a positive outcome as far as one disciple is concerned. The wonderful and patient teaching of Jesus weeded out the sin of unbelief, bringing forth fruit – Peter’s later, wonderful confession of faith.

The Gospel of Mark

By considering the response of the Lord Jesus to this unbelief we learn methods of response. At the outset, consider the example of the Lord Jesus. We can admire the wonderful patience of Jesus Christ with humanity. Patience is a key attitude towards dealing with the darkness of unbelief. Jesus the Lord had already performed amazing miracles. He had taught in a manner in which people were amazed at His authority and wisdom, yet here we find Him still battling against unbelief, characterised by scepticism and a thinking limited to the material things of life. He is still battling against unreceptive hearts and minds refusing to accept the evidence before them.

Feeding the four thousand: unbelief answered by compassionate action

In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat: and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far. And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?' Mark 8.1-4.

Once again we can note the compassionate heart of Jesus. He reminded the disciples of the situation which faced the multitude before Him. Jesus reminds us that the Gospel is both spiritual and practical. He had been teaching, but at the same time He was mindful of the practical. He is the great Sympathizer and He is teaching that true Christianity will have a heart of caring compassion.

Let us consider the assessment of the disciples to the challenge that was before them. All around them was a barren wilderness; the situation was impossible. How do we cope with impossible situations? There are times when the Lord encourages us with His Word. At other times God uses Scripture to correct and counsel us in dealing with impossible situations. It is always time to examine our heart and our

Assessments Taken in Unbelief—Answered by Jesus

motives to biblically assess such situations, but there is also the need to exercise faith to combat unbelief. In this exercise of faith we need to get historical. By this I mean we should consider what God has done in the past.

‘From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?’ verse 4. Bread in the wilderness! This gives a clue. Faith asks the question, ‘What has God done in the past?’ History should have taught them that actually God had fed over two million people in the wilderness for forty years. He had provided manna from Heaven and water from the rock. But spiritually this also gives us encouragement for assurance.

‘Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ’ 1 Corinthians 10.1-4.

Then, in the more recent past, before their very eyes this same Jesus had fed five thousand men, plus women and children. That was again in an impossible situation. In feeding the five thousand He showed His providential provision, but this was simply a picture of His far greater spiritual provision as the Bread of Life. So this impossible situation was an opportunity for faith to learn from the past and to cry out to the Lord. The situation is impossible with us but not with God.

‘Is any thing too hard for the Lord?’ Genesis 18.14.

Sadly, unbelief looks at the situation from a human perspective and stops there. But faith says with hymnwriter:

*His love in time past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink;*

The Gospel of Mark

Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review

Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite through.

John Newton, 1725-1807

Imagine what Jesus must have thought of this question. Here Jesus answered the unbelief of the disciples by compassionate action. The congregation had been with Him sitting under His ministry of teaching and healing for three days. He was not prepared to send them away without also attending to their practical needs.

Jesus stepped into the situation with authority and power, and performed another miracle of feeding. On this occasion no less than four thousand people were fed with bread and fish. As before, notice how the Lord first of all gives thanks to His Father in Heaven for the bread and fish. Just seven loaves and a few small fish were available at the start but in the hands of the Lord Jesus the impossible becomes possible, and there is more than enough to go round. In fact, in harmony with the seven loaves at the start, there were seven full baskets left at the end!

The word used here in the original relates not to the Jewish bread basket but the Gentile-style bread basket. Previously the Lord Jesus had provided for a Jewish multitude in the same miraculous manner. Now here He is providing for a Gentile multitude, and seven Gentile-style full bread baskets were left. This miracle is a voice to us. Jesus compassionately cares about all the world, Jew and Gentile.

The Gospel has a voice to unbelief in its ministry of compassion. Reaching out to the needs of people both spiritually and practically is a powerful tool against unbelief. Historically we know the origins of welfare in our land are found in the Gospel ministry of the Christian Church. The lesson we can learn from the compassionate ministry of the Lord Jesus is that when faith is exercised in the name of the Lord Jesus with a compassion for the lost, when our ministry is with a heartfelt compassion and in the hands of the Lord Jesus by faith,

Assessments Taken in Unbelief – Answered By Jesus

the impossible becomes possible. For with God nothing is impossible and only God has the power to deal with the closed heart of unbelief.

The way we do ministry is vitally important and here the Lord Jesus demonstrates heartfelt compassion. Here unbelief is responded to by the compassionate, merciful action of Jesus.

Pharisees and Sadducees seeking a sign: unbelief answered by reproof

‘And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation. And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side’
Mark 8.10-13.

The approach of these religious leaders to the Person of Christ was arrogant and aggressive. They came to make trouble; they came to have a quarrel, to dispute with Him. Once again we are reminded of the Old Testament example. Here the religious leaders seek a sign from Heaven. It is as if they are saying, ‘Moses gave us bread from Heaven, but Your bread is earthly bread’ (see *John 6.28-35*). These religious leaders were arguing and testing Jesus, demanding He provide an even greater miracle, a so-called sign from Heaven in order to satisfy their limited idea of what the Messiah should be able to do. But their unbelief was so deep that even if Jesus had given in to their demands it would not have been enough.

Demanding signs from God in such a manner is not a sign of belief but unbelief itself. As Jesus said in the account of the rich man and Lazarus, even if He sent Lazarus back to Earth to warn people the rich man’s friends would not take heed because they were at the same time rejecting the Word of God.

This attitude of unbelief which demanded signs, which placed

The Gospel of Mark

emphasis on the supernatural to satisfy humanistic desires, caused grief to Jesus. *'He sighed deeply'* (verse 12). If Jesus had given in to this humanistic demand He would have destroyed the very work which He had come to do. He would have succumbed to the demands of man and allowed Himself to be governed by man and not by His Father in Heaven. This demand was no different in its motive and character from the temptation of Satan in the wilderness, attempting to limit Jesus to an earthly kingdom and for Him to be dictated to by Satan and sinful men.

This attitude brings forth a strong reproof from our Lord.

'The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed' Matthew 16.1-4.

Jesus directs them to the one great and all-important sign, His death and resurrection. Notice here how their sinful demand for a sign is turned around by Jesus to be a means of Gospel witness, for now He exalts God in revealing that the greatest sign from Heaven there will ever be on this Earth is Christ crucified and risen!

Here we are reminded that it is sinful to put emphasis on signs and wonders, while neglecting Christ as Saviour. The greatest sign God has given to the world is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. No amount of signs and wonders will make any impact for the soul if this one great sign is neglected.

A while ago a leader who had been promoting the so-called 'signs and wonders movement' made an interesting statement. In his view,

Assessments Taken in Unbelief – Answered By Jesus

having been in the leadership of the movement for many years, the preaching of the Gospel was so neglected as to be almost totally ignored. The name of Jesus was used as the power to accomplish so-called signs and wonders while the soul was neglected. It was this attitude that Jesus was rebuking in the demand made to Him here. Unbelief was answered by rebuke. The Gospel is all-important to you.

A problem with the bread: unbelief answered by warning

Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?’ Mark 8.14-21.

The disciples found themselves in a most frustrating situation. They had just witnessed another most remarkable miracle. They had seen an abundance of bread, seven huge baskets full. Now they are twelve men plus Jesus in the boat with only one loaf of bread. How could they have been so silly as to have forgotten to take bread? Perhaps there were recriminations, blame being put on one another. It seems this was the issue which was captivating the minds of the disciples.

As they travelled in the boat they were:

- deflected from properly considering the implications of the miracle they had just witnessed;

The Gospel of Mark

- frustrated that having just recently loaded seven baskets full they now found themselves with only one loaf.

We do not know exactly how long it was since the miracle but we do know that bread had been readily available on shore because the disciples spoke of having forgotten to take bread. The great spiritual lessons from the miracle of Jesus concerning His deity were clouded by a trivial matter. Their obsession with the situation was confirmed by their guilty reaction to the warning of Jesus, and they failed to properly understand it. Jesus knew how they were assessing the situation. He saw a similarity in their worry to that of the religious and the secular thinking. *‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.’*

In this context Jesus was using the illustration of leaven, yeast, in an unfavourable sense. It was in the sense of evil teaching considered as a powerful and corrupting influence. Jesus was saying, ‘Beware of descending into the same attitude as the Pharisees and the Herodians.’ In *Matthew* the Sadducees are also included. The unbelief of the disciples was answered by warning of:

- the leaven of the Pharisees – traditionalism which clouds the reality of truth;
- the leaven of the Herodians – secular materialism which governs the desires;
- the leaven of the Sadducees – scepticism which governs the attitude of heart;
- the leaven of the disciples – pessimism which governs the attitude of mind.

Jesus went on to ask them about the two miracles He had performed. He asked them a series of questions to aid their right thinking. Why are you reasoning among yourselves? Do you still lack understanding? Do you not see or hear? Do you not remember? When I broke the five bread cakes for the five thousand, how many basketfuls

Assessments Taken in Unbelief – Answered By Jesus

did you pick up? (They say, Twelve.) When I broke the seven bread cakes for the four thousand, how many big basketfuls did you pick up? (They say, Seven.)

Jesus is calling us to consider, respect, and meditate, and then apply God's faithfulness in the past by faith to the present difficulties. 'Why, in the experience of those miracles, do you not understand? Learn from past experience as much as you learn from past historical events in which you had no part. The Person Who created those miracles is with you. How is it that you do not understand? Where is your faith in this situation? When will you understand that the spiritual is of more importance than the physical? I stand before you as the Bread of Life.' Unbelief is answered by warning.

Conclusion

- How do we assess an impossible situation? In our inability we turn to Christ's ability, believing.
- How do we assess our relationship with Jesus? Through His death and resurrection, believing.
- How do we address a frustrating situation? In turmoil remember the spiritual priorities of life, believing.

Jesus' patient teaching had fruit: see Peter's statement of faith:

'And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ' Mark 8.29.

27. JESUS GIVING SIGHT PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY

Mark 8.22-26

The account in our text begins with an act of human kindness to a man in need. Human nature, when moved by the conscience, has a desire to demonstrate acts of kindness. Kindness to our fellow human beings is evidence that, though fallen, we are created in the image of God. Any act of kindness to another stems from the moral conscience motivating a person to do good. Kind action is evidence that a person is created by a good God Who has given us a moral conscience.

But here these men are not only acting in kindness to the blind man; they are also leading him to the right Person, having a passionate desire for him to be healed by Jesus. They intercede for this blind man before Jesus; they seek his wellbeing and healing. Their example shows the need not only to be kind, but in our kindness to lead people to Jesus for healing of the soul.

Jesus – personal and purposeful dealings

‘And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town’ Mark 8.23a.

Previously we noticed how the people bringing a deaf man to Jesus besought that Jesus put His hand on him (see Chapter 25, page 234). They were seemingly dictating to Jesus, telling Him what to do to bring about a healing. Jesus responded in His own wise, compassionate, understanding manner reaching out properly to the poor man. He took him aside from the multitude and dealt with him personally in a way he could relate to – He is our Example.

Here in this case the blind man’s friends asked Jesus to touch him, and again Jesus responded by leading him away. Jesus received the

The Gospel of Mark

man and then straightaway dealt with him personally in His own way. He took him by the hand and led him away from the crowd to a place outside the town.

From this we learn the ways of Jesus, the Son of God, are higher than our ways and His thoughts than ours (*Isaiah 55.9*). Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him away from the crowds and out of town – He was not a publicist!

What an experience for the blind man – his hand held personally by Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God! Here is the Creator of the heavens and the Earth taking a blind man by the hand and leading him with care. *‘In all their affliction he was afflicted’* (*Isaiah 63.9*), and here Jesus identified with this man’s suffering and came alongside him. Although Jesus the Good Shepherd cannot physically hold your hand today like He did the blind man, He most certainly can do so in a spiritual sense as the Good Shepherd holding us through His love and Word.

Here in this case He has taken hold of a suffering, blind sinner and taken him outside the town to give him sight. So the Lord Jesus went outside the city gates of Jerusalem to suffer, bleed and die at Calvary to save sinners, sinners who are spiritually blind and needing God to open their eyes to come from darkness into light. The Lord Jesus went out of the city gates at Jerusalem with the need of sinners on His heart to heal them.

As Jesus took this man by the hand and personally took him out of the town to be healed, so this reminds us of the need of our own personal dealing with Christ, away from the melee of the world. We need to go to Him and with Him outside the confines of the ways of the world to follow the ways of God for salvation.

‘Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here

Jesus Giving Sight Physically and Spiritually

have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come' Hebrews 13.12-14.

As the blind man was led by Jesus so God leads His people.

'Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness' Isaiah 41.10.

'For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee' Isaiah 41.13.

'...and put his hands upon him... he put his hands again upon his eyes' Mark 8.23, 25.

As Jesus had previously put His hands on the deaf man's ears to communicate to him, so here He put His hands on the blind man's eyes to communicate His purpose to him. He had held his hand to reassure him and guide him; now He puts His hands on his eyes to encourage him. So the Lord encourages sinners in His gracious, saving purpose towards them in promises that touch their hearts. Spiritually He leads us by His hand – He opens our spiritually deaf ears and our spiritually blind eyes. He deals with us personally and in perfect wisdom knowing exactly how to bring about the healing of the soul. He has the power to heal, He has the authority to heal, and He has the all-sufficiency to heal.

But we have the responsibility to come to Him, just as we are in our need, to be taken in hand by Him and to be touched by Him spiritually that we may hear precious truths and see by faith the Lord Jesus for ourselves. Ask the Lord to give you the desire to come, to feel your need to come, and to draw you to Himself. As the Lord Jesus was ready to heal the blind man when his friends brought him to Jesus, so the Lord today is ready and willing to save sinners who come to Him believing in Him, trusting in Him.

This was typified when Laban said to Abraham's servant, *'Come in,*

The Gospel of Mark

thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? (Genesis 24.31). Come in: you are welcome. I have prepared a meal for you. Abraham's servant had to respond to the invitation.

'I see men as trees, walking' Mark 8.24.

On this occasion the Lord chose to heal, as it were, in two stages close together. There was a process here. This reminds us that conversion is a process. This process may be very quick, as typified in the experience of the blind man and the conversion of Paul. Other times the process may take longer, but the outcome is the same – spiritual sight given by God.

There is the first stage of conviction of sin wherein the Holy Spirit reveals truths about God and about ourselves. We are then brought to realise our utter helplessness in and of ourselves and our guilt as a sinner before God. Then God in His goodness reveals to us the wonderful truth of a Saviour, Jesus Christ the Lord. We are drawn to Him as the men brought the blind man to Jesus as the only One able to heal. There at the feet of Jesus we find a wonderful Saviour – kind, loving, gracious, compassionate, wise, mighty, and willing to save. By the Holy Spirit we are led out of worldly thinking to Christ at Calvary, the only answer to being saved. Then in repentance of our sin we go on our knees and cry out for forgiveness and find healing by faith in Christ. As this miracle teaches, there is a process, but a process with a certain outcome in the hands of God.

Here, in this miracle of healing, after He had spat on his eyes and placed His hands on them, Jesus asked the man a question: could he see anything? Now Jesus, as the Son of God, already knew the answer to this question. But He asked the question so that the man would acknowledge his eyesight was blurred like double vision. This reminds us of how in the process of being converted we do not see all things clearly at once. There are stages of revelation even after our eyes are opened spiritually to see our need. We do not see everything clearly

Jesus Giving Sight Physically and Spiritually

at first about doctrine and even about ourselves. With every Christian there is a growth from spiritual blindness to spiritual clarity. Only in Heaven will we finally see all things clearly and Jesus as He is.

*‘For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known’
1 Corinthians 13.12.*

‘After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up’ Mark 8.25a.

He had authority over the man. The blind man obeyed the command of Jesus and was restored. What Jesus required the man to do also corresponds with what a Christian is required to do spiritually – look up! *‘Looking unto Jesus’ (Hebrews 12.2).*

‘...and he was restored, and saw every man clearly’ Mark 8.25b.

As the restored man could see Jesus perfectly, completely healed by Him, so after conversion believers see Jesus clearly as their only Saviour and Lord, and praise Him and follow Him.

The symbolism of spiritual sight is a vital issue taught to the Church at Laodicea in *Revelation 3.14-22*. They had lost sight of the Lord Jesus, their first love, and needed restoration spiritually. Spiritually a Christian looks forward to the time when he will see Jesus fully and clearly as He is in His glory.

- Job’s prayer: *‘Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me’ Job 19.27.*
- David’s prayer: *‘As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness’ Psalm 17.15.*
- The Christian’s promise: *‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ Matthew 5.8.*
- The Christian’s victory: *‘But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God’ Acts 7.55.*

The Gospel of Mark

'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is' 1 John 3.2.

'...and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads' Revelation 22.4.

'And he sent him away to his house' Mark 8.26a.

Jesus knew exactly what was best for this man who had so recently had his eyesight restored. He needed to go straight home and rest; he needed to go to get used to living with the sight of his eyes. The first place to live out the new Christian life is at home. Our walk with the Lord in private at home is far more significant for our souls than what we do for the Lord openly. What we are as Christians is not so much what we are like in church but what we are like at home, when we are not on show.

'...saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town' Mark 8.26b.

Here this man was told not to publicise the miracle. Firstly, he needed to consider what had happened to him; he needed time to adjust to his new freedom. Even more importantly, he needed to consider Who it was that had healed him. This man needed time to consider Jesus the One *'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'* (Colossians 2.3).

Secondly, Jesus did not want to add to the publicity which was continually growing around His healing ministry.

28. WHO IS JESUS?

Mark 8.27-33

Jesus and the disciples travelled to the region of Caesarea Philippi. This is a region of beautiful scenery, Mount Hermon being the source of the River Jordan. No doubt Jesus took time in His journey to appreciate His creation, for He was looking at His handiwork.

'And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good' Genesis 1.31.

It is significant that in His wisdom Jesus chose this particular area to set the final course of His ministry. Caesarea Philippi was actually a pagan city – its historic roots went back to the worship of Baal. In the time of Jesus there was a specific cave for the idolaters to visit on the city outskirts. This cave was renowned, according to their idolatry, as being the birthplace of Pan, the god of nature. The cave had become a type of grotto for the pagans to gather at and also a popular tourist centre.

This was also the place where the Herodian dynasty had their holiday retreat, wilfully surrounded by idolatry. Here the Herod king of that time built a temple of white marble to the honour of Caesar. The Herodian kings themselves over time taught the people to worship them as gods like Caesar. The early New Testament Church was persecuted by King Herod as he engrossed himself in idolatry as a demi-god.

It was in the area of this stronghold of Satan that Jesus clearly revealed to His disciples His ultimate mission. Jesus said that He would sacrificially lay down His life and rise again, going on to say, as in *Matthew*, that:

'I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' Matthew 16.18.

The Gospel of Mark

Jesus through His death and resurrection would conquer Satan and provide the certain victory for His church. It is significant that Jesus chose this time and place to speak openly about His coming work at Calvary, for at Calvary our Saviour fulfilled the Messianic prophecy given by God in the Garden of Eden after the Fall that He would bruise Satan's head – He would trample on Satan and conquer victorious in salvation. Jesus walked into Satan's stronghold at Caesarea Philippi and told His disciples God's way of salvation.

But before this teaching about salvation Jesus asked a very important question: *'Whom do men say that I am?'* (Mark 8.27). The answer given by the disciples demonstrated that Jesus was now considered a special type of Person, One Who had risen from the dead – either John, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other Old Testament prophets – appearing as Jesus. It is interesting to note that while He was alive they believed Jesus was Someone Who had actually risen again, yet after He died the reality of His personal resurrection as the One raised from the dead was denied.

Nowadays men, as then, view Jesus simply as one of the prophets. This is the opinion of the world, the majority view: Jesus is another in a line of famous prophets. This is the politically correct position; it fits in with other religions – Jesus, 'one of the prophets'. This is who men say that He is today.

But Jesus moved on to ask a very searching question of His disciples. Their answer would show whether they had understood the testimony, words and evidence of Jesus, and whether in so doing they had the courage of their inner Holy Spirit-led convictions to confess His name: *'But whom say ye that I am?'* (Mark 8.29).

It is always difficult to go against the tide of popular opinion. In this day and age laws are made based upon popular opinion. Politicians say to prospective party leader candidates, 'If you go to the left or right you will be unelectable. You must mould your policies to popular appeal to get elected.'

Now Jesus gave His disciples the opportunity to state what they personally thought about Him. In the stilling of the storm they had cried out, 'This is the Son of God.' But here it was quiet and peaceful; they were not in any danger; Jesus was not performing any miracles before their eyes. They simply had to answer thoughtfully from their hearts Who Jesus was. This response must be thought through and be sincere, a statement of truth from the heart. It was a crucial time for the disciples.

Peter speaks first: '*Thou art the Christ*' (Mark 8.29). In Matthew's account it is recorded he said, '*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*' (Matthew 16.15). Peter made this statement of truth through the inspired revelation of God. God the Father revealed to Peter, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the truth about His Son.

'And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven' Matthew 16.17.

Now it is evident that while it had been revealed to Peter that Jesus was Christ the Son of God, the Messiah, Peter did not clearly understand at this stage the true work of the Messiah. This makes the earlier miracle of the healing of the blind man of deeper significance. Peter's view of Jesus Christ was like the blind man's testimony: '*I see men as trees, walking*' (Mark 8.24). It was pointed out to me recently that in those days men carried home small tree branches strapped to their backs, so this would explain why the blind man, in his initial blurred vision, referred to men as trees walking by him. He was seeing but not clearly, without focus and detail. We saw how conversion is a process, that at first we do not see everything clearly but, in God's process of revelation, doctrine becomes clearer. It proves to us that while God was at work in Peter's heart it was an ongoing work of revelation through teaching.

The Gospel of Mark

Peter reacts to the words of Jesus

'And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him' Mark 8.31-32.

The disciples were about to be challenged with a paradigm shift of thinking regarding the work of the Messiah. To understand the shock of the statement of Jesus to the disciples regarding His death and resurrection we need to understand something of what the current Jewish thinking was of who the Messiah would be.

The Jewish leaders had arrived at the view that the Messiah would be a supernatural intervention of God, but on behalf of the Jewish race only, ultimately resulting in a golden age of peace, with the Gentiles totally overthrown and Jewish supremacy established. Before the coming of the Messiah there would be a time of terrible tribulation, with the physical and moral order having collapsed. Into this chaos would come Elijah, the forerunner and herald of the Messiah. He would bring order into the chaos in preparation for the coming Messiah.

Then the Messiah would appear in a great superhuman manner to vindicate the Jewish race. The nations would gather together to fight against the Jewish nation, and in particular the Messiah. The result would be the total destruction of the hostile powers. The Messiah would take the field and destroy great nations; He would smash His enemies into utter extinction. Jerusalem would become the most incredible and important city in the world. The Jews who were dispersed in the world would gather to the holy city. Palestine would be the centre of the new world and the rest of the world subject to it. Finally there would come the new age of peace and goodness which would last forever.

Who is Jesus?

By the time Jesus was ministering here on Earth the Jewish interpretation of the Messianic age spoken of in the Old Testament had become nationalistic and political, combined with the spiritual hope of the ushering in of goodness and peace. The disciples would have been taught to understand the Messiah in something like these terms, so for Jesus to speak about death, and that at the hands of the religious leaders, was totally alien to their understanding of the Messiah.

Jesus is now teaching the doctrine of His suffering, death and resurrection openly. The disciples must be taught the great reason for His coming to this Earth. Peter reacts quickly and takes the arm of the Jesus, the Son of God, taking Him to one side.

Consider the picture – the roles are reversed. Jesus should be leading Peter, but Peter is leading Jesus. He pulls the Son of God aside like we would pull someone to one side and say, ‘I want a word with you.’ When the truth challenges us we are sometimes like Peter in our thinking: ‘Surely this cannot be right! God is the God of love; surely this path of suffering cannot be right.’ So in our minds we take Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to one side in a role reversal and contradict His leading. God is teaching the truth but we reject it, attempting to lead God along a pathway of human reasoning, a pathway which avoids suffering and shame and promotes our limited time-bound view of life. Is Jesus leading us at this moment, or are we taking Jesus to one side to resist His teaching? Is there a role reversal in our dealings with the Lord? Are we becoming wiser than God?

Peter rebukes Jesus

‘And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him’ Mark 8.32.

Peter not only pulls Jesus to one side, but he now rebukes Jesus. In the original wording of *Matthew’s Gospel* Peter is saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on Yourself, God be merciful to You.’ He tells Jesus He must be mistaken. Now I am sure Peter does this out of the best motives. He cannot bear to think that His beloved Lord should endure such

The Gospel of Mark

sufferings. Surely Jesus was going to be the King of the Jews; surely He was going to demonstrate His authority on Earth. How could suffering and dying in such a way fit in with this programme? Peter was sincere; he loved Jesus, he wanted the best for Jesus, but Peter was sincerely wrong. Sincerity in and of itself does not always mean truth. People can be sincerely wrong, and have a misguided sincerity. People sincerely believe there are many ways to God, in their own truth set in their minds, or in Islam or Hinduism, but that does not make it right. People say, 'Surely there must be other ways of knowing and worshipping God. Surely it is only kind and loving to accept all kinds of faith.' So they make themselves wiser than God.

'Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil' Proverbs 3.7.

Are we making ourselves wiser than God in trying to encompass beliefs that are not in accordance with the Word of God in the name of loving and sincere tolerance? Satan makes this so plausible! Are we taking a friend by the hand and saying, 'This pathway of suffering cannot be right for you. God is a God of love and would never permit this in your life'? Yet God gave His beloved Son to die on the cross.

Jesus rebukes Peter

'But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan' Mark 8.33a.

When we become proud of our position we are likely to make big mistakes. Here Peter, in his impetuous nature, had walked in front of Jesus, reversing the roles with his Lord. He received a strong rebuke: 'Peter, you are doing the work of Satan!' This is what happens when the roles are reversed; when we walk in front of our Lord we get in a terrible mess. The hand of God always leads us in the right way.

'And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation' Psalm 107.7.

How this rebuke must have convicted, shocked, and humbled Peter. Jesus is very firm with him: 'However well meaning your motive, Peter, Satan is behind your words.' Jesus the Lord speaks the truth: when we react against the words and way of Jesus we are doing Satan's work.

Jesus rebuking Peter for doing Satan's work reminds us of how hard Satan tried to stop Jesus going to the cross. The wilderness experience was Satan's attempt to lure Jesus away from the work God had given Him to do. Here Satan makes another attempt through Peter, one of the closest friends of Jesus.

We must be careful of the well-meaning friend who takes us by the arm and tells us not to commit ourselves to God's way wholly, who rebukes us for our whole-hearted devotion to God's will. Beware of the person who presents to us an alternative to God's way, dressed up in spiritual language. They may well be sincere and well-meaning, but they are actually, without realising it, doing Satan's work. Jesus told Peter that Satan was behind his words. The previous words of Jesus to Peter were so comforting; now these words were so convicting. Blessed Peter – he was favoured as he testified of Christ being the Son of God. The next day Peter was doing Satan's work! Beware! The self-confident, full-of-himself Christian believer soon becomes a useful tool for Satan. But note: Jesus allowed Peter to go so far and no further.

'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed' Job 38.11.

Jesus reveals Peter's problem

'...for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men' Mark 8.33b.

Now Jesus revealed to Peter what his problem was. Peter's problem was the same as our problem is so many times. His words, actions and thinking were governed by the old nature not the new. He was

The Gospel of Mark

governed by men, mindful of the things of men. Peter wanted a king to promote the Jews. At this time he thought of Jesus in terms of time, not eternity. The carnal mind is governed by our fallen human nature. The spiritual mind is governed by our new spiritual nature given to us by God. As William Gadsby (1773-1844) put it:

*In every believer two armies are seen,
The new man of grace, and the old man of sin;
In Christ he is perfect, and free from all guilt,
Yet in himself evils are both seen and felt.*

Conclusion

‘Who do you say that I am?’ A question we must all answer.

*What think you of Christ? is the test,
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him.*

John Newton, 1725-1807

29. AN ETERNAL INVESTMENT

Mark 8.34-38

The invitation given by Jesus in these verses is made in the context of His death and resurrection. In verse 31 Jesus taught that, '*the Son of man must suffer many things.*' There is a certainty about this statement. He will be killed and He will rise again after three days. So we are faced with our first question: Why must Jesus die and why must he rise again?

Why is Jesus so emphatic on this issue? Because the death and resurrection of Jesus is the only way of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Christ crucified is God's final answer to the problem of sin. In fact, this Calvary event, the death and resurrection of Jesus, is God's one and only answer, God's one and only remedy for our personal disobedience against His pure standard. There is no other answer!

What a blessing it is to be able to share the good news of the Gospel of God with sinners. Recently a person said to me, 'I am too bad for God to save me.' To be able to say that God sent His Son Jesus to save sinners can bring hope and light into the darkness. That particular person went away saying they would think about this message of the Gospel. Christ crucified and risen is God's one and only way whereby we can be saved. It is the only way whereby saved sinners can gain access into Heaven when they die. God's way is the only way.

This is why Jesus rebuked Peter so severely when he attempted to restrain Him prior to this, attempting to persuade Him to avoid accepting and obeying the suffering of the cross. Jesus said, '*The Son of man [that is Jesus] must suffer many things.*'

Why must it be Jesus who should suffer? God demands perfection but we are not able to meet God's standards. We all sin by disobeying

The Gospel of Mark

God; therefore we all deserve the punishment of God because of that disobedience. God cannot compromise with sin. We are in a helpless condition.

We can often read of incredible rescue operations where a person is injured on a mountain, totally helpless to get off, dependent upon rescuers to come and deliver them. The rescuer has to find them, stabilise their injuries, and deliver them from their situation. We are helpless, dependent sinners, needing a Saviour to rescue us. God is love and He sent His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord, to this world. He lived a perfect life and then suffered the wrath of God on the cross because of the sin of others. He bore the punishment and died on behalf of all those who put their trust in Him. By this sacrifice He satisfied God's justice completely on their behalf. One of the reasons why Jesus Christ the Lord must suffer is God is love. The Bible says:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' John 3.16.

Jesus has borne the punishment for sin on behalf of sinners like me and like you. It was the greatest action of love. Jesus died on the cross to get the victory over sin, but He rose again to get victory over death. The Bible says:

'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' 1 Corinthians 15.55-57.

His resurrection proved that Jesus was the Son of God. It proved that God the Father had accepted His sacrifice and His sufferings on the cross. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we can be sure there is forgiveness. We can be accepted as pure before God through Jesus Christ. It is on this foundation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that the invitation is given.

The invitation

‘And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me...’ Mark 8.34a.

This invitation is extended by Jesus Christ and is open to anyone who has a desire to follow Him. How important the wording of an official invitation to a function needs to be. Great care is taken to ensure correct spelling and punctuation, that proper etiquette is used and the true purpose conveyed. The greatest and most important invitation of all time is worded in a simple and yet profound manner. It is suitable for all types of people in every walk of life – no one is left out. ‘*Whosoever will come after me*’. Everyone is addressed in the same sincere manner. There is not a special invitation for important people and another for ordinary ones. There is not one invitation to the rich and a different one to the poor. This invitation is given in the same manner by Jesus Christ to all who have a desire to follow after Him.

A personal invitation given by the Leader Himself

‘Follow me’ Mark 8.34b

To encourage us, this statement assures us that Jesus is going before. In this capacity the Bible describes Him as the Good Shepherd. As the Good Shepherd He personally leads, directs and protects. As the Good Shepherd He personally goes before, cares for, directs, secures, and lays down His life. He calls us personally to come after Him, to identify ourselves with Him, to follow Him as our Leader.

In the days of Jesus, the shepherd in that part of the world always led the sheep, going before to guide them. This was explained by a tour guide to a group of tourists visiting Israel. He carefully told them how the shepherd leads and the sheep follow under his protection. However, as they were travelling along the road they went past some sheep being driven by what looked like a shepherd. So the group told

The Gospel of Mark

the guide his information must have been wrong. ‘Look at this shepherd driving not leading the sheep.’ So the guide got the driver to stop the bus, jumped out and ran across to the shepherd to ask him what he was doing. He came back with the answer. This man was not a shepherd but the local meat trader driving the sheep to market. The shepherd who cared led his sheep – the trader had no personal care and drove the sheep only to get them to market.

As we consider our own situation here on Earth, we are either a driven people or led people. Satan tempts and drives people to Hell and despair. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, invites and leads people to Heaven and fulfillment.

Cost

*‘...let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me’
Mark 8.34b.*

If anyone wishes to follow Jesus then they need to remember the cost. Jesus is ‘up front’ about the reality of following Him. These steps can only be taken with the enabling of the Holy Spirit. They are given by Jesus with this understanding of our dependence and reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

a. Self-denial

This means turning away from any dependence upon yourself to be right with God to trust in God alone. You can have absolutely no dependence upon your own goodness, works, opinions, philosophies, or ceremonies. Self-denial means turning away from selfish interests which detract from following Christ as Lord. It means giving up those things which are to do with the old way of sin, when Christ had no place in your life. It means to concentrate on those activities that develop you in the new way of life of following Jesus.

b. Identification

Taking up your cross means to accept the consequences of following

An Eternal Investment

Christ. There will be a measure of persecution and sacrifice. There has to be commitment.

c. Right thinking

It means living a life which harmonizes with the example of Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

*‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus’
Philippians 2.5.*

He humbled Himself, took the form of a servant, and was obedient even unto the death of the cross.

The reason for making the eternal investment

‘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 save it’ Mark 8.35.

Jesus teaches that if we are willing to devote our whole lives investing them in Christ, if we are willing to let go of the old selfish way, then we will actually gain much more. Such a step is an investment for eternity. If we take this step of faith to follow Jesus, trusting in Him for salvation, we will gain eternal life in Heaven. By contrast Jesus teaches that if we only live for time, for this world, thinking that we are saving our life, then we will ultimately lose it eternally.

The Lord told a parable about a man in love with his pension. He had no thought for his eternal future and ended up losing everything (see *Luke 12.16-21*).

Reason

‘For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’ Mark 8.36-37

Jesus now gives two powerful warnings, which are both reasonable and logical for us to consider. In the first warning Jesus sets the value

The Gospel of Mark

of material gain against the value of the soul. This has to do with a person who focuses only on material things, the man who has no concern for his soul, the eternal part of his being. This person is incredibly successful and financially secure and powerful, focused on being successful.

A writer in *The Times* described the director of a popular TV programme as having a god-like status as he sits at the board room table to fire, or ultimately to hire, a person. Wealth and success equals power. Those being tested are desperate for material success and power. The loser goes off in a taxi, but the winner rides off in a Rolls Royce.

Material success equals prestige in today's society. I noticed on a property sale website recently some interesting wording for a luxurious one bedroom flat for sale overlooking the Thames very near Westminster. It was selling at the incredible price of £1.25 million, and was described as being 'ideal for society coffee mornings'!

Here Jesus reasons with us as to why we should heed His call. He gives the most extreme example of material wealth and power that could be obtained if it were possible. Imagine for a moment, a person gained the ownership of all the land and wealth of the whole world. This person was acknowledged as the most powerful leader and the wealthiest person in the whole world. This person, who has gained such unprecedented success, wealth, and power, has neglected their soul, the spiritual element of their being which continues after death for eternity. In the final analysis Jesus reasons, what is such power and wealth worth if that person goes to a lost eternity without God and without hope? The door of death is the great leveller. The one thing in common that billionaires have with others is that they leave all their wealth behind at death; it means nothing as far as eternity is concerned.

In the second warning Jesus asks the question, '*What shall a man give in exchange for the soul?*' (verse 37). Here the question relates to

An Eternal Investment

a person who has died and realises their great and awesome mistake. They are desperate to rescue their lost soul but it is too late. Jesus says it is an impossibility to exchange anything to redeem the soul that is lost in eternity. The soul cannot be redeemed and rescued after death. The soul can only be redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ here on Earth in time, and only as we repent of our sin and trust only in Him. If we neglect so great salvation in Christ while here on Earth we will be lost forever in eternity without hope. The Bible says:

*‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?’
Hebrews 2.3.*

Following the statement about His death and resurrection, Jesus laid down principles of discipleship. Whoever desired to follow Him must take up their cross. Taking up the cross and following Jesus means identification with Him. It means sharing in His rejection, shame, suffering, and death. It means denying self, crucifying selfish interests to follow the will of God.

The ‘what-is-right-for-me’ philosophy of life is replaced with the ‘what-does-God-want-for-me’ principle. Whereas the world says, ‘Save yourself!’, Jesus said, ‘Yield yourself.’ To save your life you must give your life, meaning surrender to Christ’s authority as Lord. The reward for such faith and action will be a glorious and eternal future in Heaven.

Jesus uses heavenly logic, as we have already seen, in *Mark 8.36-37*. The soul is our inner being, the person we are. A right, living relationship with God is of the greatest importance for us as a person. The richest man in the world in 2015 was worth 79.2 billion US dollars. But even all that cannot purchase a right relationship with God or spiritual life; neither can such wealth be compared with the value of the soul.

Then the Lord spoke about loyalty in *Mark 8.38*. The greatest

The Gospel of Mark

disservice we can do to ourselves is to deny Christ. We live in a day and age where self is Number One. So many of the adverts recently speak in terms of, 'You deserve it', 'It's right for you', or 'It's all about you.' If we really respect that we are made in God's image and value our soul then what is right for us is not rebellion against Christ but a right relationship with Christ. One of the great reasons why this is so vital for us is because of what we all face. We all face an eternal future. Jesus is going to impress this upon Peter, James, and John.

Conclusion

Jesus makes reference to His authority at the end of time on the great day when He will judge the world. If we, by faith, desire to follow Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, and are not ashamed to be identified with Him, we can be sure when Jesus comes again He will not be ashamed of us, despite our failures and weakness.

*Jesus, and shall it ever be,
A mortal man ashamed of Thee?
Ashamed of Thee, whom angels praise,
Whose glory shines through endless days?*

*Ashamed of Jesus! that dear Friend,
On whom my hopes of heaven depend!
No; when I blush, be this my shame,
That I no more revere his name.*

*Ashamed of Jesus! yes, I may,
When I've no guilt to wash away;
No tears to wipe; no good to crave;
No fears to quell; no soul to save.*

An Eternal Investment

*Till then, nor is my boasting vain,
Till then I boast a Saviour slain;
And O may this my glory be,
That Christ is not ashamed of me.*

Joseph Grigg, c.1720-68

If, however, we are ashamed of Jesus and refuse to follow Him and reject His authority, then He will not recognise us as His on the great Day of Judgment. On that day it will be too late; nothing can be given in exchange to redeem the soul.

Jesus speaks here in His authority as the Creator, Saviour and Judge of the world. As our Creator He has a right to speak in such a manner. We may think the wording of Jesus here is very direct and commanding; this is His pure leadership. He knows what is wrong with us, and He knows how to fix what is wrong with us.

An illustration may help. Many years ago a would-be mechanic was working on his Model T Ford car which had broken down. As he was trying to fix the problem a new Model T Ford pulled up alongside. Out stepped the driver looking very smart. He looked at the engine and confidently suggested, 'If you'll adjust this screw here, your car will run.' Well, the would-be mechanic stared at the stranger and thought, 'He doesn't look like a mechanic!' But then he'd already tried everything he knew to do. So he adjusted that screw, tried again to start the engine, and lo and behold, his car sprang to life. In amazement the man turned to the helpful stranger and said, 'Just who are you anyway?' The man said, 'My name's Henry Ford! I made that car! I ought to know what makes it run.'

The Lord Jesus Christ made you. He knows what is best for you. He invites you to come to Him and follow Him.

30. WORSHIP HIS MAJESTY

Mark 9.1-8

After the teaching of Jesus about His death and resurrection and the need to follow Him, He now gives Peter, James and John a special preview of His glory. From this connection we can be assured that the cross of Christ and the resurrection of Christ lead all those who trust in Him to Glory! The crown of glory is received via Christ Who suffered on the cross!

‘...but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy’ 1 Peter 4.13.

These three – Peter, James, and John – were now going to have a foretaste of Heaven on Earth.

Look – His majesty

‘He was transfigured before them’ Mark 9.2.

Peter, James, and John were given a glimpse of the majesty of Jesus Christ. This was an awesome experience for these men. They were privileged to witness one occasion on Earth when Jesus revealed a glimpse of His personal glory. Peter, writing about this event later, describes it vividly ascribing the event as evidence of His majesty.

‘For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’ 2 Peter 1.16-17.

This event displays the glory of the person of Jesus Christ. ‘*He was transfigured before them*’ has the meaning of His glory being radiated

The Gospel of Mark

from within. Hundreds of years before when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai having received the law of God, his face shone and had to be veiled because it was reflecting the glory of God. The Lord's glory on the mount was not a reflected glory but a glory which radiated from within. It was Who He really was, the glorious Son of God, Christ the Messiah.

Moses and Elijah appeared before them. Why Moses and Elijah? Moses represented the law of God (otherwise known as the Ten Commandments or the moral law of God), given to him on Mount Sinai, showing the perfect way to live. These laws Christ fulfilled perfectly.

Elijah represented the prophets who had foretold the coming of Jesus Christ. These prophecies Jesus was fulfilling perfectly. The glory of Jesus Christ was demonstrated in this perfect fulfillment of both the law and the prophets.

Peter, James, and John were shown the connection between the glory of Christ and the cross of Christ. Note the conversation at that glorious time. They were not talking about the amazing view from the mountain; they were not talking about God's creation, or even about the majesty of Christ. They were talking about the suffering of Christ.

'Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem' Luke 9.31.

On the mount Peter, James, and John had a foretaste of heavenly fellowship. Jesus was standing there in glory, and Moses and Elijah were standing with Him in glory. Moses and Elijah beheld His majesty while conversing with Him. In their sinless perfection there were no barriers. In their glorious state they demonstrated perfect fellowship.

Listen – His authority

'This is my beloved Son: hear him' Mark 9.7.

The account in the *Gospel of Luke* reveals that Peter, James, and John

Worship His Majesty

had fallen asleep. It is likely that they had initially been praying with Jesus but having spent the day walking up the mountain, these men were no doubt physically exhausted. While they slept, Jesus continued in prayer, during which time He was transfigured. So the three disciples were woken by the glorious light of Christ's glory. They were now in a state of shock and Peter was so overwhelmed with awe, wonder, and fear that he said the first thing that came to his head.

If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias' Matthew 17.4.

A lot of us can identify with Peter. When it is best to say nothing we insist on saying something as a form of release. It is evident from the record in Scripture that Peter was not thinking about what he was saying. He probably thought it would be good to set up a kingdom there and then on the mountain so Jesus, Moses, and Elijah could rule the world.

Secondly, Peter was implying equality between Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. This is a common problem among other religions. He was treating all three as equals. Is this a correct assessment? No, because at the point where Peter implied this, God the Father spoke. The words of God the Father spoken from Heaven directed them to the Lord Jesus! The Father will not permit His beloved Son to be put on the same level as Moses and Elijah. He was transfigured as the glorious Person to encourage them to focus upon His majesty.

Directly, immediately, suddenly, after God the Father had spoken from Heaven, they looked up and saw no one but Jesus. *'Jesus only.'* Moses was a great man, so was Elijah, but My beloved Son, Jesus only, is God's pattern. He is the Saviour; He is the Lord; He is the only way. The whole experience filled and consumed them with fear and trembling.

The Gospel of Mark

Compassion with His glory

'And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves' Mark 9.8.

But Jesus came; Jesus touched them; Jesus spoke to them.

'And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid' Matthew 17.6-7.

They lifted up their eyes and saw no man but Jesus only. This is a picture of salvation.

The purpose of the transfiguration – the pre-eminence of Christ

For centuries mankind did not realise that the sun was central to solar system. So it is spiritually. We make no progress until we see this vital point – Christ is all and in all.

Undoubtedly this event was allowed to provide the three disciples with an unforgettable experience. This would affect them for life. This was when they learned to worship His majesty. But this account is written for our benefit too, to encourage us to trust in such a wonderful, awesome and yet gracious Person. God the Father says, *'Hear Him.'* How can we hear Him? He speaks to us through His Word; He speaks to us through the Gospel message of salvation.

'For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved' John 3.17.

'I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness' John 12.46.

Notice how the experience of the transfiguration had a profound effect upon John. In his writings he often proclaims the supremacy of Christ that we may be encouraged to trust in Him.

- The creation of the world was centred in Christ: *'All things were made by him' John 1.3.*

Worship His Majesty

- The Word of God is centred around Christ: *'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us' John 1.14.*
- The love of God is centred around Christ: *'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son' John 3.16.*
- The grace of God is centred in Christ: *'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Revelation 22.21.*
- The judgment of God is centred in Christ: *'...but hath committed all judgment unto the Son' John 5.22.*
- The worship in Heaven will be centred around Christ: *'Worthy is the Lamb' Revelation 5.12.*

The purpose of the transfiguration was to glorify Christ and to remind us of His majesty.

Conclusion

'Hear him.'

You may be thinking, 'If I could physically hear a voice from Heaven, a voice directing me to Jesus Christ just like the disciples, then I would surely believe in Him.' Peter, who had this experience and writing as an experienced Christian leader, tells us that we can hear God speak about Jesus Christ through His Word.

'For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice, which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts'
2 Peter 1.17-19

Believe in the Word of God; the Word of God is given to us to direct us to Jesus Christ.

31. NO POWER WITHOUT FAITH AND PRAYER

Mark 9.9-29

Just previous to this account Jesus had been in the mountain together with three of His disciples. There Peter, James, and John had beheld the glory of Jesus Christ as He was transfigured before them. There they also witnessed Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah about His forthcoming sufferings. Peter, on the spur of the moment, had suggested erecting three tabernacles for them to dwell in, but then they had heard the voice of God speaking to them from Heaven saying, *'This is my beloved Son: hear him.'* In fear they fell on their faces but Jesus came and touched them, they looked up and saw no man but Jesus. This was an amazing mountain top experience but now they must come down and serve God in ministry.

While returning down the mountain Jesus answered a question that arose about the Old Testament prophesy concerning Elijah.

'And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?' Mark 9.11.

Jesus had just spoken about His rising from the dead, having previously spoken of His suffering and death. However, the disciples were concerned that, while the prophesy about the Messiah was being fulfilled, the scribes argued that the prophesy about Elijah, in their view, had *not* been fulfilled – therefore Jesus was not the Messiah. The three disciples had been influenced by this thinking and were now somewhat confused by unbelief.

But Jesus kindly and truthfully explained that actually this prophesy had been fulfilled. It had been fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist who was a New Testament type of Elijah the prophet. Bold

The Gospel of Mark

and courageous John had stood for the truth, pioneering the pathway of the coming Messiah, Jesus. John the Baptist focused people's minds away from their tradition and works to the coming Messiah. He restored the vital principle of repentance and faith in the Messiah for salvation. He prepared the way for the Gospel of God in the work and Person of Jesus Christ. He restored in the people's minds the true meaning of the messianic prophecies pointing to Christ. He stated publicly, *'He must increase, but I must decrease'* (John 3.30), a principle of dependent faith in the Messiah.

But sadly the religious leaders turned against John because of his faithfulness and stand for the truth. John was rejected as they desired, and in this rejection he was a forerunner of how Christ would also be treated. This explanation served to teach the disciples Peter, James, and John that God's Word was being fulfilled. Everything was in order and following the preordained pattern and plan of God.

'And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him' Mark 9.12-13.

It is a good exercise to compare the Old Testament prophesy and see its perfect fulfilment in Christ in the New Testament. This reminds us that the one yet to be fulfilled will certainly happen – the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

After this wonderful experience, teaching, and fellowship they returned from the mountain. But directly they were confronted with a sad scene, the confusion of unbelief overwhelming faith. A great multitude, together with religious leaders, gathered around the other disciples. They could hear arguing and shouting; there was a dispute going on.

No Power Without Faith and Prayer

This experience was reminiscent of the scene in the Old Testament many hundreds of years before when Moses returned from the top of Mount Sinai with Joshua, having met with God in the giving of the law. Moses had experienced a glorious yet solemn experience on the mountain top, but on their return from the mountain they witnessed a terrible sight – unbelief had overwhelmed faith! Losing patience as they awaited the return of Moses and Joshua, the Children of Israel had given up on them. They were now dancing around a golden calf as their god. Because of unbelief and a lack of faith and prayer, worldliness took over and idolatry prevailed.

Here on their return from the mountain Jesus was confronted with a scene of unrest and disappointment. This account reminds us of the problems of unbelief and what effect it can have upon our lives. We know the heart of the problem was unbelief because in the account in *Matthew* Jesus tell us so (*Matthew 17.19-20*). When we compare all the accounts we see when there is a lack of faith and prayer unbelief always prevails. When we neglect the partnership between faith and prayer, and serve God without them, we will be powerless. But our experience does not stop at that point; gradually unbelief creeps into our attitude and overwhelms us.

Unbelief brings confusion

‘And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them’ Mark 9.14.

Why does unbelief lead to confusion? Because whenever we move from faith and prayerful dependence upon God, the result is spiritual confusion. It is evident that in the absence of Jesus the remaining disciples had handled the problem of the little boy in their own strength. From the later explanation given by Jesus for their failure, they realised they had not prayed seriously; they had not really proceeded in faith and dependence upon God; they had relied upon past experience forgetting a vital ingredient.

The Gospel of Mark

Their past success in healing was according to the power given to them by God. It was in partnership with their faith and dependence in prayer, and the sovereign good pleasure of God. They were privileged to be given a special power for a special time, but this power was not independent from their relationship with God. It teaches us that past blessings are no guarantee of present blessings if we neglect faith and earnest prayer.

So we have this pathetic scene. The crowd have witnessed the disciples' failure in healing the young boy. The loving, caring father who had come with hope for the healing of his only son was disappointed.

But what had happened to the power? The crowd were sceptical and unbelieving, and now heard the disciples and scribes arguing. A heated discussion was being carried out about their failure to heal. The disciples were vulnerable without Jesus. They had a great crowd surrounding them and a group of scribes arguing with them, so taking the opportunity to attack Jesus through their failure. The situation was fast deteriorating into the confusion and chaos caused by the problem of unbelief.

Unbelief grieves God

'And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me' Mark 9.15-19.

When Jesus arrived on the scene the crowd moved directly towards Him and greeted Him respectfully. But why were they greatly amazed

No Power Without Faith and Prayer

at Jesus arriving on the scene? Some say there was still evidence of the transfiguration glory of Jesus Christ shining on His face. Others say it was because of His sudden appearance, while still others say that the timing of it was remarkable – when His remaining disciples were in trouble He appeared suddenly. What we do know is that suddenly, at the appearance of Jesus Christ, respect was shown to Him.

Jesus asked about the nature of the dispute and discussion, realising there was an issue causing a problem. The father explained his only son's great affliction and his great need of healing, including the failure of the disciples previously to heal him. Jesus assessed the problem and at once diagnosed the problem as unbelief. The whole scene – the attitude, the confusion, the argument – grieved His Spirit, and tried His patience.

We may consider scepticism and unbelief as our right, our freedom as individuals, but what we often fail to realise is that our unbelief grieves God. Why is this? Because it is our unbelief which damages us the most. Our unbelief is a rejection of the Person Who loves us the most and can do us the most good. Unbelief hinders blessing. Our unbelief denies us power from God.

Jesus refers to that generation as being faithless and unbelieving. Their constant denial and scepticism wearied and amazed Him. The resolution to the crisis came when Christ became the centre of the situation. The father, who loved and cared for his son, came to Jesus.

Now there is something here which is of importance to Christian witness and the problem of unbelief. What is interesting is the way that the father speaks of having already bought his son to Jesus in verse 17. Originally he came intending to bring him direct to Jesus but in His absence had asked help of His disciples. This was because the disciples were ministering in the name of Jesus Christ. Does this not remind us of the awesome responsibility and privilege of Christian ministry and witness? We can either bring honour or dishonour on Jesus Christ by the way in which we handle situations.

The Gospel of Mark

The father correctly identified that the disciples were powerless to cast out the demonic spirit in his child. He brought his son to Jesus and directly he arrived the spirit troubling him threw him to the ground. He had a terrible seizure and suffered greatly, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father, in a kind, considerate, compassionate manner, how long he had suffered like this. The father explained the severe nature of the attacks in the past concluding with the statement: *'If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us'* (Mark 9.22).

Notice here how faith is mixed with unbelief – faith battling with unbelief. The 'if' registers some doubt. Is Jesus really able to do anything and deal with this situation? The call for compassion and help registered the faith in the situation looking unto Jesus. This father's response is one which I am sure we can relate to – unbelief and faith in tension. How then can this be dealt with?

Unbelief must be addressed

'Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief' Mark 9.23-24.

Now the Lord Jesus reminded the father of his responsibility in the situation. He asked the father about his own faith. He challenged the father to address the problem of unbelief. But how is this unbelief which the father feels mixed together with his faith to be addressed?

The cry of the father from his heart with tears clearly shows us how to address the problem of unbelief. Unbelief was a heartfelt concern to this man – he struggled with doubts and fears. Unbelief can be a problem that besets believers from time to time and it should cause us heartfelt concern. Now he is before the One Who can truly help him with his doubts and fears. Bring it to Jesus: *'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'* Ask Jesus to deal with your unbelief, your doubts

No Power Without Faith and Prayer

and your fears. Tell Jesus about your doubts and fears, ask Him to deal with them. Faith is a gift from God; unbelief is a hindrance that needs to come into subjection to Jesus Christ as Lord.

The father turns from the helplessness of man to the power, beauty and acceptance of Christ

*‘When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him’
Mark 9.25.*

Jesus healed the father’s son by His almighty power, but at first it appeared the experience had slain him.

*‘And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead’
Mark 9.26.*

Many said, ‘He is dead!’ But Jesus took him by the hand and he arose. This can be for us a picture of conversion. We die to the world and the power of Satan; we rise again in the power of Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord.

Unbelief is overcome and faith is watered and developed through prayer

When we experience failure it is better to go privately to God to find out where we have gone wrong.

‘And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?’ Mark 9.28.

The disciples in privacy asked the reason for their failure. The reason, Jesus said, had to do with the relationship between prayer and faith. When faith and prayer are working together great things can be accomplished. Faith and prayer are the best of friends, they need each other. Faith is essential to prayer, but faith will not grow and develop without prayer. We see this relationship in the cry of the father.

The Gospel of Mark

Jesus is reminding the disciples that difficult problems are not resolved through casual prayer. Committed prayer and growing faith go together, while unbelief and casual and uncommitted prayer go together.

Christ, as the centre of faith, the objective of faith, the foundation of faith, is the key to answered prayer. The power behind the ministry of the Gospel is by prayer and faith in His name, for Jesus Christ always intercedes according to the will of the Father. Nothing is impossible with the Father to overcome, if it be His sovereign will. God can make all things possible according to His will, in partnership with committed prayer and faith.

Here our Lord also brings our attention to the need of fasting and prayer. Fasting here refers to abstinence from food for the purpose of focusing on prayer and faith in God. It is a sign of our total dependence upon God when facing an impossible situation, a situation beyond our capability to overcome. Fasting as a religious work for merit on a certain day and time has no place in true Christian faith. Fasting is a personal, private exercise when we humble ourselves by faith before God, pleading His help.

The disciples had addressed this problem in their own strength and wisdom. It is evident that they entered into this ministry without needful serious prayer. Power and fruitfulness in the work of the Lord is never evident without fervent prayer and faith. With God all things are possible according to His will and wisdom.

32. THE SAVIOUR SEARCHING THE HEART

Mark 9.30-37

‘And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him. And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest’ Mark 9.30-34.

There were occasions in the ministry of Jesus when He ensured He had time with His disciples privately. He was determined they were clearly told about the nature of His sufferings, death and resurrection. On the road through Galilee He taught His disciples again about His impending death and resurrection but the disciples feared to make proper enquiry about of the teaching of Jesus regarding Calvary. They listened to what Jesus had to say and yet were afraid to ask the right questions. Why was it the disciples were afraid to ask Jesus what He meant at that time?

From the record in *Matthew* we read the disciples were exceedingly sorrowful – deeply distressed (*Matthew 17.23b*). They were reminded again of the impending departure of Jesus Christ. No doubt they were deeply sad at the thought of losing their Master. The way forward was totally different from their preconceived notions of the Kingdom of God.

Luke records that Jesus exhorted them to allow these truths of Calvary to sink into their ears:

The Gospel of Mark

‘Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying’ Luke 9.45.

Maybe they were ashamed of their ignorance, afraid of facing up to the truth of what Jesus was teaching. Had not Jesus rebuked Peter severely previously when he sought to deter Jesus from this pathway? Maybe the disciples thought it is safer to keep quiet – this was an area they did not understand. Later we are told they were slow of heart to receive these truths; there was a resistance of unbelief.

‘Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken’ Luke 24.25.

Again we are reminded here of the powerful nature of unbelief that attacks believers at times. The disciples show us how difficult it is for us to accept truths which change our preconceived notions. We have perhaps grown up to accept certain traditions in an unquestioning manner. When these get challenged through the Word of God, like the disciples our comfort zone gets rocked. The human mind has an amazing faculty for rejecting or blocking what it does not wish to know. People accept parts of the Christian message which suit them, but refuse to believe the challenging parts.

A searching question: What were you talking about?

The state of the disciples at this time must have saddened the heart of Jesus. He had just told them again clearly and concisely that He was going towards the cross. Instead of there being a response of enquiry and seeking to understand these wonderful truths, His disciples respond, missing the point, by descending into a conversation about who would be the greatest. They shut the truth and the reality from their minds and a carnal conversation ensued. This is one of the characteristics of unbelief; it shuts out profitable conversation replacing it with an unprofitable one.

The Saviour Searching the Heart

Jesus already knew as the Son of God what they had been talking about, so His question was to give them opportunity to own up. As Jesus puts His finger on a serious problem besetting the disciples, there is a guilty silence. It is evident that deep down pride was still a motivating force in their lives. Who would be the greatest?

Now when we discuss issues together we must always remember there is an unseen Guest Who hears what we are talking about, and knows what is motivating our hearts. The Holy Spirit sometimes presses the memory 'recall' button in our mind challenging us to recall a conversation we have had. What motivated it, what were we trying to achieve for ourselves?

The disciples felt convicted, their silence revealed their shame because their conversation was actually motivated by pride. Who should be the greatest, who would be in control? Jesus had spoken previously about the coming of His Kingdom in power, but they still thought materially.

A searching presence: they kept silence

The issue was properly addressed when Jesus was brought into the picture. The light of Jesus the Truth shone into the darkness of that atmosphere. It is remarkable how a thing acquires its true character when it is set in the eyes and presence of Jesus. So long as they thought Jesus was not listening and that Jesus had not seen their faces, the argument about who would be the greatest seemed to the natural mind to be fair enough. But when that argument had to be stated in the presence of Jesus it was seen in all its unworthiness.

If we took everything and set it in the sight of Jesus it would make all the difference in the world. What would Jesus teach, what does Jesus think when I am saying this? Could I go on talking like this seeking to be the greatest if Jesus was listening? But Jesus, as the Son of God with the Father and the Spirit, does hear and know today. There is the unseen presence of God from Whom we cannot escape.

The Gospel of Mark

This was the cry of the psalmist –

‘Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence?’ Psalm 139.7.

A searching answer

*‘And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them...’
Mark 9.35a.*

When a teacher intended to make an important pronouncement in the days of Jesus they would sit down. The person always sat to teach. Now Jesus dealt with this situation very seriously. He deliberately took this action to signal to the disciples this was not debating or conversation time. This was authoritative teaching time and they needed to listen to the teaching of Jesus here regarding true greatness.

A searching example of humility in service

‘If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all’ Mark 9.35b.

True greatness is not measured in God’s eyes by the person who is always striving to be first. In God’s sight true greatness is measured by the person who is willing to be last in the queue. We can always know how our heart is when we are concerned for our seating position at a function.

This attitude was evident with the disciples on another occasion.

*‘Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him’
Matthew 20.20.*

So Jesus is speaking again about self-sacrifice, putting others first, allowing yourself to be last. It was not that Jesus abolished ambition; rather He redefined its purpose in its purest sense. Instead of having an ambition to rule we are given, by God’s grace, a desire to serve. Instead of the ambition to have things done for us and be noticed we

The Saviour Searching the Heart

are gifted in God's grace with resolve to do things for others for the glory of God and not ourselves. The people who are remembered as having made a great contribution to the Church are those who have had this attitude and commitment: 'How can I use my personal God-given gifts and talents to serve others?' It was prophesied of John the Baptist, '*For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord*' (Luke 1.15). John the Baptist was a servant of all.

To illustrate this teaching in a powerful and a vivid manner Jesus took a little child in His arms. Here we are given an amazing example of the tenderness of Jesus. It would appear that children were totally at ease, and felt totally secure in the presence of Jesus. Here was a little child who had no problem being taken up in the arms of Jesus.

But what was Jesus teaching here by using a little child in this manner? A little child in this context indicates humility in the sense of their littleness. A little child was brought before the disciples who were concerned about greatness. Jesus is teaching that in God's sight true greatness is to have a dependent, humble attitude. A little child is dependent, weak, small, and learning. Here a little child is set in the context of dependence as one in need of loving care.

Jesus is teaching something very profound. When Jesus sees a church caring for the needs of others, especially for those young in the way, He sees this as a sign of true spiritual maturity. Instead of thinking who will be the greatest, we should be willing to serve others, especially the needy ones.

Here we are reminded of the importance of children's ministry – to humble ourselves to serve little ones. They cannot further our career or boost our steps to greatness, but in receiving them we are pleasing Christ.

There is also a warning here for us. In our society we are trained to only cultivate relationships which will prove beneficial to us. Our

The Gospel of Mark

contacts and our conversations are governed by potential benefits to us in different ways. This is very subtle.

‘My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?’ James 2.1-4.

This attitude can sometimes creep into the Church. Our conversations are geared more to those we may respect and who are in our social standing, or those whom we get on with. Others may be neglected as they do not tick all our boxes; they are not worth our ‘networking’ time. But as God looks down from Heaven He sees the ones who are caring for His dependent little ones. Servants are the ones who are great in His sight.

What goes through our mind as we scan the congregation after the service? Who do we make a beeline for? One of the tests of our spirituality is whether we care first for the needy people that go unnoticed. By giving of ourselves to the needs of others we receive them in the spirit of God the Son and the Father.

‘And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’ Matthew 25.40.

33. FOLLOWING JESUS

Mark 9.38-50

Jesus has been teaching that in God's sight true greatness is characterised by humility and service. One of the great tests of such humble service is how we treat the little children, the needy, the vulnerable, and especially new or immature believers. Now Jesus continues to teach important lessons about the attitude and personal responsibility of His followers. There are challenging points which Jesus makes giving direction to the true nature of following Him.

Following Jesus with uncompromised, mature tolerance

'And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward' Mark 9.38-41.

Jesus had previously dealt with a problem that arose among the disciples of who would be the greatest. Jesus had spoken to them of Calvary and His resurrection, and instead of seeking more from Him about this truth they descended into a conversation about who would be the greatest following His departure. So it was that Jesus, using a little child, taught His disciples a better attitude of humility and service in order to be used of God.

But now here again the disciples, led by John, overstep the mark. This time it is by their unwise assessment and treatment of another. They had seen a man casting out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and forbad him to do so. Why did they stop him? Not so

The Gospel of Mark

much because of his ministry, but of the fact that he did not follow them! He is not one of us; he does not follow us; he is not under our control, therefore it cannot be right.

It is evident that the spirit in which John dealt with the man casting out in the name of Jesus was wrong. He approached the matter on the wrong foundation and with an authority not based on the Spirit of Christ. John approached it on the basis that he was not 'one of us' and therefore he cannot be right. But Jesus approached the matter on the basis of whether the man was opposing the work of God or not. In the estimation of Jesus this man was not against the cause of God.

The Lord here is teaching His followers to use wise judgement to understand and accept that God is sovereign and not bound by man's restrictions. The teaching of Jesus is an important test of our attitude. Jesus applies a principle: if the man is sincerely working in His name, he would then be foolish to speak against Him afterwards. Therefore, in that context, he is on our side. He is not against the Lord but supportive; he actually means well.

There is a helpful lesson to be learned here. There can be a lot of intolerance among Christians about different denominational positions and backgrounds. Sometimes the attitude of being 'not one of us' creeps into our thinking. Church distinctives that are not essential to salvation must not become so important to us that we cannot accept the workings of God in those who do not follow our way of thinking entirely. We need to guard against an intolerant attitude to those whose views and practices are not in line with ours.

The most important point is, are they for the cause of Christ or against the cause of Christ? This must be the first question in our minds. Are they for the true Gospel of God or against the true Gospel of God? So, in the context of the passage, was this man taking the name of the Lord in vain, or serving the name of the Lord? Jesus approved of him so we each need to examine the criteria of our judg-

ment and guard against man-centred intolerance. This does nothing to serve the cause of Christ. See the Old Testament example of Eldad and Medad.

*‘But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp. And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!’
Numbers 11.26-29.*

Jesus goes on to speak of those serving the cause of Christ by giving in His name in verse 41. Here again Jesus applies a principle. The word ‘whoever’ is important in the context of serving, not opposing the Church of Christ. Jesus reminded His disciples that He looked for the spirit of tolerance as opposed to exclusivism in His work. There is no room for a superior attitude just because we may think we are doctrinally correct and reformed. Whoever gives support to you as a believer in Christ’s name in sincerity and humility, that act of kindness, however small, even a cup of water, is pleasing to God and will receive its reward. Do not measure people by the quantity of their works but by quality of spirit. However simple, is it sincere? Even a cup of water given in the name of the Lord in the right spirit is pleasing to God. What encouragement there is here! You may feel your service is so small but in a right spirit it is precious.

‘Let us follow the teaching of Jesus and while maintaining what we ourselves regard as purity of doctrine, let us reach out the hand of brotherhood to all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ

The Gospel of Mark

and build upon the foundation of His infallible Word.' William Hendriksen.

Following Jesus with compassionate, wise care

'And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea' Mark 9.42.

This is one of the most searching and solemn verses in Scripture. Verses like this must not be used by Christians to attack one another, for it is a text of solemn judgment. It may be as you read this that you have fixed this text on someone else. Sadly Christians have an incredible ability at times to hurt one another by using Scripture, and this is sinful.

If we are honest with ourselves we have probably all, as Christians, fallen at this hurdle from time to time. But it is God who is our Judge, not man, and when we use texts like this to accuse we overstep the mark. As this is a judgment text it is not for mortal man to use as a means of attack or condemnation. If this text is permanently true of one of us, and we die in this condition under condemnation, it means we are not a believer but a hypocrite, an enemy of the Church of Christ. Jesus warned about this problem teaching, *'Judge not, that ye be not judged'* (Matthew 7.1). If we judge other believers, condemning them, we bring judgment upon ourselves.

So how do we approach this solemn text? It is certainly a text of judgment upon unbelievers who attack God's children, causing them to stumble. It is certainly a text of judgment upon hypocrites and professors of Christianity who are hindering, not helping. But remember that the work of judgment is of God, not of us, and certainly not to be used to attack a believer.

However, while it is not a text of judgment upon true believers, who can never lose their salvation, it is a text that serves as a warning to believers to examine their hearts and convict them under the

Holy Spirit. It is a judgment text that condemns the unbeliever but is also used as a warning to believers to examine their hearts. While an unbeliever hardens his heart under such condemnation, a believer warned is humbled before God. A believer convicted will run without delay by faith to the Throne of Grace. He will confess his sin and change his behaviour.

So while this text is not one to be used as a weapon against other true believers, it is one that calls on each one of us to personally examine our own heart and lifestyle. This is a text that calls for us personally to bow in humility before God. Am I doing anything in my life which is actually hindering the progress of a new, feeble, or weak believer? Have I acted, spoken, taught, or led in a way which misdirects or hinders the spiritual progress of a person?

Now we know there are times when we do fail in this area and at those times we need to confess and repent. However, in judgment Jesus is speaking here of a person who wilfully, knowingly, carelessly, and purposely walks in a way to hinder; when we knowingly, purposely, distract, discourage, deceive, or despise one of God's little ones. To offend here means to trip up, cause to sin, mislead, or direct away from Christ and a simple faith in Him.

Special care must be taken of God's little ones. Who are these 'little ones'? This verse is not meant to be viewed as based on age. Jesus is speaking here affectionately about His children, His followers, but especially the new and vulnerable ones, the ones who have a very simple faith. He has in mind also true seekers, those new to the way, those who have a simple desire to follow Him. Especial care must be taken of those entering into the narrow way from a non-Christian background. We must take care not to behave or speak in a way that offends them, puts them off, or discourages them.

Believers are very precious in God's sight and there is a responsibility given to properly care for them. Here, in the context of the passage,

The Gospel of Mark

Jesus is dealing with false teachers and even believers who actually cause harm to vulnerable believers. Their false, legalistic, and liberal teaching placed erroneous ideas in the minds of new or immature believers. Some majored on works, religion, rules, regulations, or legalism, having little understanding of grace. Other liberal teachers advocated that as long as you went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, what you did the rest of the week did not matter.

Such teaching actually has a devastating effect upon the lives of believers. They are manipulated by error. In the context of this passage it seems that the particular type of people Jesus is speaking about were those advocating a lifestyle which involves a refusal to separate from a sinful pathway.

This sinful pathway can obviously take various forms – it can be in the form of false religion or worldliness. The effect of this is damaging. A new, weak Christian learns from, or is moved by, another professing Christian, either by their false teaching or worldliness. This can offend by causing the person to stumble. Here Jesus is saying it would be better for such to lose their life than spend their life deceiving little ones.

Again Jesus is making His judgment on the question of whether the person is for or against the Church of God. We need to be very careful about the example we are setting others, so making a person to stumble because of wrong teaching, a wrong attitude, wrong words, or wrong witness.

Following Jesus by separation

‘And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to

Following Jesus

be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched' Mark 9.43-46.

In the issue of tolerance we considered earlier, Jesus does not mean compromise to ungodliness. Here, using figurative language, Jesus warns against the danger of holding on to sin, and not separating from wrong teaching or evil in our lives. The test that we are a born-again Christian centres on our willingness to take up our cross and follow Him. The standard of practical holy living has been so low among Christians that very often the person who tries to practise spiritual disciplines in everyday life is looked upon with disapproval as a 'legalist' by a large portion of the Church. And for the most part, the followers of Jesus Christ are satisfied with a life so conformed to the world, and so like it in almost every respect, that to a casual observer there is little difference between the Christian and the pagan.

There may be a secret sin we are unwilling to let go for His sake. Jesus says, when faced with this difficult challenge, think of the consequences of not letting go. So often with sin we fail to consider the end game, the desire of Satan to see us destroyed by sin.

Jesus uses words to shock us into the reality of hell. The word He uses for hell in the original text is 'Gehenna'. This refers to the Valley of Hinnom. It was located south of Jerusalem. It became known as a place of fire, for it was here in the days of Ahaz and Manasseh that children were roasted to death as sacrifices to Molech. The God-fearing king Josiah in his reformation declared the place unclean, a place of evil and witchcraft. It became the place where the rubbish was burned in a continual, smouldering heap infested with worms.

To describe hell by using the name Gehenna, Jesus was using the most awful location known to his hearers. Why does Jesus do this? On a number of occasions Jesus describes hell in picture language to stimulate our minds and consciences. Jesus knows that when we use the term 'hell' it can just be a word that has an inadequate meaning

The Gospel of Mark

for us. For example, it is commonly used as a swear word today. So by using the word 'Gehenna' rather than the word 'hell' in the original, Jesus is purposely describing hell. His hearers would directly understand the danger, the warning, the awful nature of hell. This is what hell is like – an eternal Gehenna.

Three times Jesus repeats the same warning. Hell is an awful place; hell is never-ending; hell is a real place. Hear the words of Jesus:

'But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' Matthew 8.12.

'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' Matthew 10.28.

'Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?' Matthew 23.33.

'And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal' Matthew 25.46.

'And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name' Revelation 14.9-11.

'And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever' Revelation 19.3.

Following Jesus

‘And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever’ Revelation 20.10.

Jesus is not instructing us literally to harm ourselves physically. He uses figurative language. He is teaching that besetting sin should be flung aside decisively; dillydallying is deadly. That inappropriate attitude, motive, conversation, book, film or relationship must be cut off. Halfway measures wreak havoc – the surgery must be radical.

Our responsibility before God is to repent, and as we sincerely cry out to God He can, with the enabling power of His Holy Spirit, transform our lives. There will be pain in the separation from error and worldliness and besetting sin, but this pain is nothing compared to the pain of the end consequences of refusing to do so. Hendriksen says:

‘Those who stubbornly and hatefully reject and continue to reject the message of God’s love and grace in Christ, hardening themselves to the point where they even begin to lead astray Christ’s little ones, never repenting, the full force of Mark 9.48 and similar passages must be maintained.’

Following Jesus by using our Christ-centred influence

‘For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another’ Mark 9.49-50.

The Christian life is tested sometimes with fire by trial. By this Jesus means the Christian life is to be refined. He is speaking now about the need of true Christian witness. Jesus has been warning the disciples of being a snare to others and becoming ensnared themselves. They could then become vulnerable to compromise.

The Gospel of Mark

Whenever there is a separation between values and practice, things break down. In ancient China the people desired security from the barbaric invading hordes to the north. To get this protection, they built the Great Wall of China. It is 30 feet (9 m) high, 18 feet (5.5 m) thick, and more than 1,500 miles (2400 km) long! The goal was to build an absolutely impenetrable defence—too high to climb over, too thick to break down, and too long to go around. But during the first hundred years of the wall's existence China was successfully invaded three times. It wasn't the wall's fault. During all three invasions, the barbaric hordes never climbed over the wall, broke it down, or went around it; they simply bribed a gatekeeper and then marched right in through an open door. The purpose of the wall failed because of a breakdown in practice and values.

Jesus is speaking here about those who resist the Holy Spirit's warnings, remaining in an unrepentant state and consequently unable to regain their saltiness. To have salt within oneself and enjoy true peace with one another means we are walking in the Holy Spirit bearing the fruit of love, truth, kindness; to be a living witness of the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

There can be no greater privilege in this world than to be an ambassador for Christ. Having salt in yourselves you become a blessing to the Church and to society. As salt preserves, cleanses, and melts ice, so a true Christian can be such a blessing. If Christians live with salt in themselves there is bound to be unity, because the salt melts the ice. Salt preserves the good and cleanses the bad.

34. JESUS CARES

Mark 10.1-16

Jesus was preaching and teaching against the background of the pride and hardness of men's hearts. His disciples had been arguing about who would be the greatest. They had also forbidden someone to work in the name of Jesus because he was not one of them. Jesus had warned them against such hardness and insensitivity especially to His little ones. Now He had come to the region of Judea where multitudes of people had gathered to hear Him teach.

Here once again He was faced with the issue of hardness apparent in society at the time. The Pharisees came to Him with a question.

'And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him' Mark 10.2.

It is important that this question is set in its true context. There was a debate going on at the time between two Hebrew lawyers. This related to the real meaning of *Deuteronomy 24.1-4*:

'When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the Lord: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.'

The Gospel of Mark

According to the ruler Shammai and his followers the reference to some shameful thing refers to adultery. In contrast, the ruler Hillel and his followers taught a much more liberal approach. For them this reference could relate to the flimsiest reason. For example, a husband could reject his wife if she accidentally served him food that had been slightly burned, or if she talked loudly, or if he preferred the eyes of another woman.

At the time of this question divorce was common and easy, easier in fact than it is today. The Jewish law said a man could write out a letter divorcing his wife without any notice or warning:

‘Let this be from me thy writ of divorce and letter of dismissal and deed of liberation that thou mayest marry whatsoever man thou wilt.’

Women were extremely vulnerable and oppressed in the days of Jesus. A woman was regarded as an object, with no rights, and was at the complete disposal of her husband. It was, then, in this context of hardness and oppression that Jesus made His reply. Jesus was speaking in an anti-cultural manner and in support of the oppressed. He understood the equal worth in God’s sight of both a man and a woman.

Jesus cares for marriage

- He confirmed this underlying problem of hardness:

‘And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept’ Mark 10.5.

- He upheld the blessing and sanctity of marriage as a creative ordinance:

‘But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder’ Mark 10.6-9.

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them' Genesis 1.27.

'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh' Genesis 2.24.

This is the ideal principle.

- He warned against superficial divorce:

'And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery' Mark 10.11-12.

- He allowed divorce and remarriage only on the basis of unfaithfulness to the wife or husband:

'It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery' Matthew 5.31-32.

'He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery' Matthew 19.8-9.

God's ideal is an exclusive, lifelong union of a man and woman in marriage. This is powerfully displayed with Adam and Eve who were solely for each other. This is the ideal principle and purpose of marriage. Divorce is reluctantly permitted by God because of the weakness of human nature. Divorce is nowhere encouraged or commanded in Scripture. It is, however, allowed in certain limited

The Gospel of Mark

circumstances. Divorce and remarriage are allowed on two grounds:

a. Where a partner is guilty of serious sexual misconduct (see *Matthew 19.1-12*).

b. Where an unbeliever insists on leaving a believer because of their faith. A believer is not under bondage in such cases (see *1 Corinthians 7.10-16*). Again this is seen as a last resort. The Christian believer must do all they can first to remain with their unbelieving husband or wife. But if there is an unwillingness on the part of the unbelieving partner to live peaceably with the believer, and they move out of the relationship, the believer is not to remain in bondage in that situation.

The care of Christ for children

‘And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them’ Mark 10.13-16.

The characteristics of His care are clearly manifest in these verses.

a. His interest – verse 13

Jesus greatly appreciated and was interested in any efforts made to bring children to Him to be blessed. In the *Matthew* account the parents’/carers’ desire was explained – for Jesus to pray for their children. Such was the desire for what was best for their children that there was a continual effort to bring them to Him. The words *‘they brought young children to him’* in the original tense means ‘they were bringing’ in an ongoing sense. In fact this was an ongoing issue for Jesus throughout His ministry wherein He consistently cared for children.

This particular event was recorded to establish a principle. Jesus

was interested in and cared for the children. His positive, approving response to the efforts to bring children to Him gives rise for assurance today. We have God-given authority and encouragement to be involved in bringing children to Jesus – it is a good work.

b. His intervention in compassion – verse 14

The disciples at this stage had an inadequate view of the greatness of the heart of Jesus. They simply applied the rigid rules of society to the children, thinking they had no place in adult company, before they could gain access to Jesus. The disciples had already decided for Him – the children must be sent away. In fact not only was access denied to the parents, carers and friends of the children, they were also rebuked by the disciples. In this way the disciples as ambassadors let their Master down.

The issue here is that the disciples, without consultation with Jesus, went ahead in this policy of rejection. Jesus was greatly displeased. He had great indignation over this negative attitude. This is one of the few times it is recorded that Jesus was angry. His anger was always righteous and justified. The additional term *'much displeased'* confirms to us the depth of the problem. It serves as a warning to all who would hinder any attempts to bring the message of Jesus to children. It reminds us that, sadly, even Christians can hinder children's ministry if they view it only through adult eyes. Here we are exhorted to have a compassionate, sincere concern for children, especially for their souls. Let our service be characterised by removing the stumbling blocks for children, not by putting them up. Let our service be characterised by encouraging parents and carers to bring their children to Sunday School.

c. His invitation – verse 14

Here we are given encouragement from the Supreme Commander of Sunday School ministry. Our Lord and Saviour said: *'Suffer the little children to come unto me'*. Be a door opener not a door closer.

The Gospel of Mark

'*Forbid them not*'. Here is a clear command from the Lord, one of His authoritative 'do not's'. The disciples had no right or warrant to forbid the children access to Jesus.

The word 'forbid' here has the meaning of disappointing someone, quenching their enthusiasm. You can imagine the scene. The parents and carers had brought the children perhaps a long way. On the journey they would have explained to the children that they were going to meet a special Man, a Man known for His kindness, gentleness, and concern for people; the Healer, the Teacher, the Lord. They wanted the best for their children and had made quite an effort to bring them to Jesus. How would the parents then feel when told to go away, forbidden access to Jesus by men acting as a barrier? It would seem as though Jesus did not care.

Let us consider this just for a moment – being a barrier. We can be a barrier in our own lives and forbid our children access to Jesus by living our lives as though Jesus has no authority in our homes, where Jesus is not the overall Head of the home. Do not be a door closer!

But how wonderful to hear the intervening invitation of Jesus, those authoritative words, to come. Here the Son of God, the Lord of the whole Earth, the Saviour of the world, invites children to come to Him. Do all you can with God's help to provide accessibility for the children to come to Sunday School. Many coming from unbelieving homes have no hope of hearing about Jesus except as a swear word. The only place they are going to hear about Jesus and, in God's goodness, to come to Jesus is in Sunday School.

d. His instruction – verse 15

The Lord introduced a powerful argument in His instruction by reminding us of what the children teach us. Their attitude of dependence, trust, and openness is a picture of how all those coming to Jesus must be. A little child is totally dependent upon his parents. A little child has a trusting acceptance of what is presented to them.

A little child's welfare is ensured by a sense of security. A little child is teachable and will respond to discipline and care. So all those coming to Christ must come as a little child in total dependence. They must accept the gift of forgiveness through God's grace in Christ, by faith trusting only in Him. They must be assured of their eternal security in Christ alone, submitting to His teaching, care, and discipline.

There is something profoundly simple about accepting the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it is vital we see it this way. Jesus said there is no possibility of entry into His glorious Kingdom any other way. May the Lord grant to us a wholesome respect for what the little children helpfully remind us of. Let us view them as an asset to our understanding of knowing Christ, being a constant reminder of right faith.

e. His intercession – verse 16

The Lord Jesus Christ was a Man Whose actions harmonised perfectly with His Word. Notice how He was willing to become personally involved in the wellbeing of the little children. Let us remember that the great Head of the Church is mindful that there are lambs in His Kingdom. The great Head of the Church took time to take special notice of the children. While His time on Earth was most precious, with many calls upon His time from adults, He did not consider that little children did not matter, or were of little importance. As one commentator put it, 'He had room in His mighty heart even for them and blessed them.'

He was willing to be clearly identified with their needs and be seen with them, not as a politician who likes to hold a little child as a photo opportunity, but as One Who really cared. Remember they did not arrive all perfectly clean straight from 'Mothercare'! Perhaps some were dirty, perhaps some smelled, perhaps some were unwell and had coughs and colds. Perhaps some had been making a fuss, older ones pushing and shoving; some were crying, shy, or noisy. Nevertheless the Son of God took them up in His arms and blessed

The Gospel of Mark

them. He prayed for them. I am sure our Lord would have talked with them and shown an interest in them. He would have talked to them in a manner which they could understand. We only read of children coming to Jesus. We do not read of any of them running away from Him. Little children are perceptive, and they knew this Man cared. They felt secure, wanted, appreciated, and understood by Jesus. So it was they came under His blessing. They were with a Man Who took time out for them, Who was serious about them and not patronising. They were with a Man Who respected their needs, Who understood their situation.

Now we are called to care like Christ. We cannot bestow blessing like Christ, but we can be a means of blessing. To care like Christ means:

- to intercede earnestly in prayer for the children under our care;
- to pastor them sincerely and seriously, seeking their soul's wellbeing;
- to prepare our lessons thoughtfully, carefully, and prayerfully;
- to provide the best support we can for them and to understand;
- to ensure we are not hindering them coming to Jesus but helping them come;
- to take care over our presentation, showing we are serious about our love for Christ;
- to do follow-up with the children, to show concern for their whole being.

May the Lord greatly bless you in your continued labours in His name on behalf of the children. May it not diminish in any way but rather even increase.

'And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not' Galatians 6.9.

Jesus Cares

Remember that our Lord is watching. It is recorded, '*When Jesus saw it...*' When Jesus looks down from Heaven may He see us as a body of believers encouraging children to Him.

35. WHAT SHALL I DO TO INHERIT ETERNAL LIFE?

Mark 10.17-27

As Jesus was walking along the road, suddenly a young man came running to Him and kneeled at His feet – a man with a burning question on his mind which needed answering urgently. Yet here was a young man who already had many things going for him in this world. He was rich, enthusiastic, a leader, a good law-abiding citizen, but there remained an aching void.

Practically and morally here was a man who seemed as though he had got things sorted in life. He had risen to be a leader while still young; he had riches, respectability, and lived a morally upright life; yet for all this there remained an all-important question which he felt needed addressing in his life. There remained one more box to tick on his agenda for life – he wanted to be sure of his eternal destiny.

Note he did not come to Jesus for physical healing; he came to settle a matter about eternal life. This man had a problem: for all his success, riches, morality, and good works he was not sure of his destiny. We are going to examine what the problem was in this man's thinking, and how Jesus dealt with it.

A sincere question

'And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' Mark 10.17.

There can be little doubt this man was very sincere in his question. However we can be sure at the same time he was sincerely wrong. The desire of the man was absolutely right and essential – the important matter of inheriting eternal life. However his understanding of how this was to be obtained was sincerely wrong.

The Gospel of Mark

‘And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?’ Matthew 19.16.

The man believed in salvation by works. He thought that through his own efforts he was able to gain acceptance with God and eternal life. ‘What shall I do?’ was the question.

What was the root problem of this man’s thinking?

- He had a superficial view of the holiness and majesty of God – he believed in God superficially.
- He had a superficial understanding of the moral law of God, the Ten Commandments, not a heartfelt one.
- His superficial thinking left him depending upon himself and his works and thus unsure about eternity.
- He accepted that there was such a truth as eternal life, but was now totally confused as to how to obtain it.

Now the greatest possession that a person can ever have is eternal life. How may we understand the meaning of eternal life being ours already in the here-and-now? Note John’s testimony about knowing in the here-and-now about the possession of eternal life unto glory.

‘These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God’ 1 John 5.13.

‘And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life’ 1 John 5.20.

Principles of eternal life

a. God’s gift

‘And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son’ 1 John 5.11.

What Shall I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?

b. Fellowship with God

'And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' John 17.3.

c. God's love in our hearts

'And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us' Romans 5.5.

d. Knowledge of the glory of God

'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' 2 Corinthians 4.6.

e. Peace of God surpassing all understanding

'And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' Philippians 4.7.

f. Unspeakable joy

'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory' 1 Peter 1.8.

g. The assurance of an eternal future in Heaven

'For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' Philippians 3.20.

There is no greater gift than the gift of eternal life. But it is a gift, not a commodity to be earned or purchased.

'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' Romans 6.23.

This rich young ruler did not possess this wonderful blessing of eternal life. He came urgently to Jesus to find out what he had to do to obtain it. He was the smartest guy in town. He had riches, position,

The Gospel of Mark

self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-righteousness, but he actually lacked the one thing needful. There was a void in his life. His problem stemmed from a superficial view of God, His holiness, His commands, and his own condition.

A searching question

‘And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother’ Mark 10.18-19.

The response of Jesus to this man’s question reveals something of His perfect wisdom in His dealings. Here was a seeker, and yet Jesus answered him on a point of doctrine. It seems he was met with a rebuff.

Jesus knew exactly how to get to the root of this man’s inner thinking. He knew exactly where this man was coming from, so His response was first in the form of a question. The first issue to be addressed was this man’s weak view of goodness. The lesson he had to learn was that when he referred to a ‘good person’, in its fullest sense it can only mean God. The man, it is revealed, had a superficial understanding of what goodness really meant. Neither did he realise that he was talking to the Son of God, not simply, in his eyes, a good teacher. For God and God alone is perfect and good.

First, this man needed to start addressing the reality of God’s perfect standard. Secondly, he needed to realise his inability in and of himself to match such a standard. God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit as equally God – is absolutely and purely the highest Good. God has revealed His standard of perfection for us in the law, which we know as the Ten Commandments. Now this rich young ruler man knew the letter of the law, yet he had a superficial view of its content and how it should be kept in its entirety. He was blind to his weaknesses and inability

What Shall I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?

in his own strength to fulfil the law completely. He was sincere in his desire for eternal life while at the same time full of confidence in his ability to keep God's law.

A defensive answer

'And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth' Mark 10.20.

Here the man's attitude is revealed. He could confidently say, 'I have kept these commandments.' No doubt he had kept these commandments in an outward sense from his youth. In a legalistic sense he could make this statement. But Jesus is more interested in the heart. He knew the man was earnest and devoted and sincerely desired eternal life. He knew the young man thought he had kept God's commandments, yet the man was failing to ask the question, 'Do I really love God with my whole being?' This is the first commandment. 'Am I obeying God from the heart?' I may not have outwardly done these things, but what about inwardly in my heart and mind?

His defensive attitude of legalism and belief in salvation by works is noted in *Matthew's* account.

'The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?' Matthew 19.20.

The man had failed to apply the law to his life according to God's standards which are about the mind, the heart and the will. This man had climbed to the top of the ladder of success in society. He thought he was good and acceptable to God and was ready to do what was needed to obtain eternal life. 'What must I do?' But his ladder was leaning against the wrong building, a building which was just about to crumble and leave him dejected and sad.

'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and

The Gospel of Mark

the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it' Matthew 7.24-27.

Jesus, we are told, looked at him with loving compassion.

'Then Jesus beholding him loved him' Mark 10.21.

Here was a God-fearing man who believed in God and lived an upright life and yet was unsaved. Jesus knew that His answer was going to pierce through the veneer of this man's life. He was going to experience sadness like he had never felt before. All his hopes, his confidence, and his assurance were going to be put in the melting pot of truth and reality. Jesus knew what the cost of following Him meant. Jesus knew the crisis decision that was coming in his life: would he follow Jesus?

Jesus knew that this was a huge test in this man's life: was he prepared to surrender all for Christ's sake? Would he cast himself on the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ? Would this man realise he could not make this step in his own strength? Would being shown his weakness and inability through the perfect standard of the law be the means of him coming to Jesus Christ? Jesus looked with tender concern for this man's spiritual well-being.

The answer of Jesus to this young man was used to reveal the true god of this man. Despite his upright living he was a man who was in love with his money. His possessions were his god. Verse 24 tells us this man's real problem was that he was trusting in his riches.

'And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!' Mark 10.24.

What Shall I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?

They were his security, his sense of being well off and independent. This man was shocked to be told in reality he was an idolater, that his possessions were his god. His riches were his besetting sin and he had to repent of this and turn from trusting in his riches to trust in Jesus. The self-confident, upright-living man was knocked over by the pure demands of God's holy law. He was being called to surrender his possessions for the good of the poor and surrender his life to Jesus. In other words, to surrender all his life and possessions under the Lordship of Christ and trust only in Him. This is really the heart of the issue.

The original question was about what he should do to inherit eternal life. The answer required denying self and trusting only in Jesus. The answer to gaining eternal life was to follow Jesus Christ. The answer to gaining treasures in Heaven was to follow Jesus Christ and surrender his life unto Him.

Rejection

'And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions' Mark 10.22.

Here was something he could not do in his own strength. Instead of addressing the issue, accepting Jesus and falling into His arms of grace and mercy, and receiving eternal life, he walked away. In the end the man made his decision on the basis of time rather than eternity, unlike Moses.

'...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward' Hebrews 11.26.

Conclusion

'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then

The Gospel of Mark

can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible'
Mark 10.25-27.

Jesus uses an illustration to demonstrate how difficult it is for those who trust in their riches to enter the Kingdom. The disciples were astonished at this event. Here was a good living man; he was rich – surely, was not this a sign of God's favour? He was well respected, he was a ruler. If this man could not be saved by his standing, who ever could?

The disciples were to learn one of the most important lessons of their life, a lesson with eternal implications! They had to learn that salvation was according to God's grace. Trusting in anything else was false. Here was a man in many ways living a morally upright life, who went to the synagogue and believed in God. Yet this man was evidently unsaved. It is impossible for men to enter the Kingdom without the grace and mercy of God. Salvation is only possible through God's grace in Christ Jesus.

The young man could not fulfil God's perfect standard in his own strength; it was impossible for him to do so. The young man needed something that only God could do for him. He needed a new heart, to abandon everything for Christ's sake and trust in Christ alone to obtain eternal life. Pride, self-confidence, trusting in riches, image and importance that can come with riches must be left at the gate.

Now please remember that Jesus was not teaching here salvation by works. He was actually teaching the opposite. He was showing that it is impossible to be right with God by our works. The disciples could see this! Jesus was using the pure law of God to show the man he was making uncertain riches his idol and trusting in them. Trusting in riches as an idol in his life revealed his first love was not God but money!

The man knew he had not the strength morally or spiritually to give

What Shall I Do to Inherit Eternal Life?

up his idol. So the ministry of Jesus using the law convicted the man and revealed his deep utter need.

‘Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith’ Galatians 3.24.

He could not free himself from idolatry. He went away sad, his self-confidence in works being shattered.

Who then can be saved? If such a man does not have the ability, the strength of will, who can be saved? With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Salvation is by God’s grace by faith.

The secret for this man to gain eternal life was entire consecration to, and trust in, the Lord Jesus Christ. *‘Follow me’*. No longer live for self, for pride, under your own works, but live for God in Christ, the Saviour and Lord.

We may think of the Apostle Paul’s conversion. He believed in God and was very religious until he met with Jesus! He later described those works as dung, worthless before God, as done in his own strength. On that momentous day of Paul’s conversion two points come through very strikingly:

1. Paul said to the Lord Jesus, *‘What wilt thou have me to do?’* (Acts 9.6).

2. Paul began to pray properly as a sinner needing mercy and grace for God in Jesus Christ.

Later Paul testified, *‘For me to live is Christ’* (Philippians 1.21).

A W Pink said:

‘Conversion consists not in believing certain facts or truths made known in Holy Writ, but lies in the complete surrender of the heart and life to a Divine Person. It consists in a throwing down of our weapons of rebellion against Him. It is the total disowning of allegiance to the old master Satan, sin, and self and a declaring, “I will have this Man Christ Jesus to reign

The Gospel of Mark

over me". It is owning the claims of Christ and bowing to His rights of absolute dominion over us. It is to take His yoke upon us submitting to His sceptre, yielding to His blessed will. In a word it is receiving Christ Jesus the Lord, giving Him the throne of our hearts, turning over to Him the control and regulation of our lives.'

'Jesus beholding him loved him.' This is speaking here of the compassionate heart of Jesus knowing the struggle and disappointment felt. It also provides a hopeful indication of the future repentance and faith of a man loved by Jesus.

36. LEAVING ALL TO FOLLOW JESUS

Mark 10.28-34

Leaving all to follow Jesus

‘Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first’
Mark 10.28-31.

Jesus speaks at first about the act of obedience in following Him as Saviour and Lord. What does this obedience mean in our life?

Firstly it means Jesus has the pre-eminence in our lives – He is Lord. This means that Jesus is the controlling influence over our life. Our relationship to our possessions, our families, or our place of abode is subject to His loving Lordship.

Loss for Christ’s sake

The key phrase used by Jesus in the action of following Him, and the result, is *‘for my sake, and the gospel’s’*. Our motive and the manner in which we do so is vital in following Jesus (see *1 Corinthians 13*). This act of sacrificial obedience rightly taken by faith is always in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ. It is to be done out of love for Jesus and His message of salvation. This becomes our motivation for life. It is for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is a principle in the step of faith in salvation: we may lose

The Gospel of Mark

materially but we gain spiritually. We lose the things of time to gain the things of eternity. This means the world, materialism, self, reputation, and ambition no longer rule our lives as 'Number One'. By faith these are laid aside to follow Christ, acknowledging Him as the Lord over our lives having been called by grace. It is an action motivated by love for Christ and Christ's message of salvation.

When we do something for Christ's sake it means we do it for His glory and in His strength. The reality of our sacrifice depends on who and what we are doing it for – what our motive is. There is no higher action or motive in life than to be identified with Christ and His message. But, as Jesus warns Christians who have chosen Christ above all else, they may lose their home, their job prospects, their inheritance, their families, and may have to move from their homeland. Some are disowned, rejected, ridiculed, persecuted, and even killed for Christ's sake – for example we hear of honour killings. Some experience great difficulties in their marriage as a believer, denied access to their relations, rejected and despised.

But if this step is taken by faith in love for the sake of Jesus Christ and the message of the Gospel, refusing to disown the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and trusting only in Him, then blessing and eternal life is assured.

Gain in Christ's name

The world looks on at a Christian who puts Jesus first in his life and thinks what a stupid thing it is to do. When a Christian refuses a promotion because it will compromise his service for the Lord, people think, 'Are you mad?' When a Christian leaves his employment because his employer is forcing him to be dishonest, they ask, 'What next?' When a Christian declines to go in the way of the world's materialism and greed and acts in a different way, the world thinks he is 'slow'. But remember: God is a debtor to no man!

At first it seems that becoming a Christian is all about giving up

Leaving All to Follow Jesus

things for Christ's sake. This is in contrast to the world's attitude, which is about getting things. Yet God says, '*Them that honour me I will honour*' (1 Samuel 2.30), and God will for sure keep His promise. What a Christian may lose materially he will gain spiritually in his soul. There are abundant blessings in Christ. This remains true for every real Christian. God will ensure their soul's eternal security in Christ – it is eternal gain.

However, here the Lord Jesus teaches a very important principle that is proven in the history of the world. While it is true, sadly, that many Christians suffer terrible losses – and Jesus mentions persecution in this verse – in places of the world like ours where there is freedom of religion the Christian has more liberty to shine. We shine as we share the Gospel in word and in action. God provides many blessings to His people.

A true Christian should be a person of truth and integrity, who is a blessing to be with. Jesus mentions here in this verse the truth of providential blessings from God, together with persecutions. In the midst of trial, affliction, and persecution, there is also providential blessing according to His will. In fact Jesus speaks of a multitude of blessings.

Providential prosperity

It is sometimes an accusation levelled at Christians that so many of them are middle class. Why is this? Christian lives placed in God's hands are often subject to providential blessing. When godliness enters into our lifestyle and stewardship of resources, then there is far less wastage. For example, billions of pounds are spent on entertainment, drink, drugs, fashion, gambling, smoking, and materialism. A recent documentary on waste gave the example of a lady who only kept her clothes for two weeks. Thousands of clothes each week are tipped onto landfill sites. People are laden with high interest and credit card debt. A man was interviewed on television recently who wasted thousands of pounds on a gambling machine.

The Gospel of Mark

Christians are no longer under the dominion of the values of this world – materialism, entertainment, and vices. They realise that all that they have is from God’s good hand. They must steward it wisely, which leads to blessing. During the Welsh Revival amongst the miners it was possible to tell those who had been converted by the state of the door step, their children’s clothes and their lunch boxes. Even their faces had changed.

Children of Christian parents are taught to be diligent, hardworking, industrious, and to be wise stewards, which leads to blessing. So there is a following of providential blessing through Christian principles imbibed while young in years.

Then there is another remarkable experience for a Christian in the ministry of giving. When we give generously to the Lord’s work we will find an amazing return on such giving. A man once said, ‘I shovel it out, and God shovels it back, but God’s shovel is bigger than mine!’

Another blessing in our Christian life is how we appreciate God’s provisions. Creation, families, and providences are no longer taken for granted. So Jesus is teaching here in the context of appreciation of and thankfulness for God’s providential goodness.

The return here must not be limited to material possessions but it also embraces spiritual blessings, for there is an even deeper reward which Jesus is teaching about. When we become a Christian, take up our cross and follow Jesus, we enter a worldwide family, the Church. We join God’s family. This means wherever we are, whatever land we are in, we can meet in houses and with families where the common bond is Christ.

I have had the privilege to work with pastors in many parts of the world, all brothers in Christ under the power of the same Holy Spirit, working to the same guide – God’s Word. We are all part of God’s family. There is a unique fellowship in Jesus Christ in His Church not matched by any other movement in the world.

Leaving All to Follow Jesus

'Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God' Ephesians 2.19.

'Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named' Ephesian 3.15.

When we become a Christian we inherit spiritual blessings which are invaluable.

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ' Ephesians 1.3.

Persecutions

Jesus never hid the difficulties by presenting only the good parts. Without doubt, a Christian will experience persecution in some form or another. How does this persecution come about? If you are living as a worldly Christian you will not suffer persecution, for the devil has nothing to worry about. Neither will the world oppose you because you are like one of them. However, if you seek to live a godly life you will undoubtedly know a form of persecution in this world. This is because your testimony makes the unbeliever uncomfortable in some way – Satan will oppose you. When you seek to serve the Lord hindrances will be put in your way, and temptations, and discouragements. This is all part of the battle of being a Christian.

'But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' 2 Timothy 3.10-12.

Eternal life

These two words encompass a never-ending state of spiritual life in

The Gospel of Mark

the soul – a future existence in Heaven. Closely linked to the teaching of the Lord Jesus here are the words of the Apostle Paul in *Galatians* 6.8:

‘For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.’

If we live our lives just for this world, for time, for ourselves, for material gain and the pleasure of this world alone, we will reap corruption; for these things which we depend upon are fading away, depreciating, and wearing out. But if we live our lives as unto the Lord, following Jesus and living by the new nature, we will reap eternal life. There is a wonderful reward of grace to be received for following Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Jesus is encouraging us to view life not just for time but for eternity. Have a greater vision!

Position

Jesus knew that the disciples had an ongoing dispute in their minds – who would be the greatest in Heaven? This is evident in the following verses where Jesus is asked to guarantee the best seats in Heaven.

Here Jesus is reminding us that our position in Heaven will be a reward of God’s grace, not works. It will not be by man’s values or estimation; it is not governed by our position in society or in the Church on Earth. The Pharisees loved the chief places and to be praised of men; their position on Earth has no merit in Heaven.

There are countless Christian believers who are serving God faithfully, especially in prayer behind the scenes. They are not known as pillars in the Church, they have no reputation, are not recognised, but they are faithful. Great will be their reward in Heaven. They are not first on Earth but are first in Heaven, for God looks at the heart. In God’s sight the person who prays much in secret and remains faithful to their calling whatever that is, yet perhaps has no prominent position in the Church, will get their reward in Heaven. The faithful

Leaving All to Follow Jesus

pastor working in a difficult location, in an unimportant position, will get his reward in Heaven. He may not make the headlines here on Earth but he is noticed by God. He will be in front of the headline-grabbing, media-savvy preacher who loves the adulation of men.

Remember the poor widow who contributed two mites. She had given her all in love unto God. And Mary of Bethany, whose act of lovingkindness to her Lord was roundly criticised and misunderstood.

‘But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?’ Matthew 26.8.

She will be eternally remembered.

Leaving glory and obeying the Father

‘And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again’ Mark 10.32-34.

The subject engaging the minds of the disciples had been that of sacrificial service. They had taken up their cross to follow the Lord, and He had promised present and future blessing. But now as they are walking along the road, Jesus is going before them leading from the front alone. Jesus was going on a journey where no other man could go, to do what no other man could do. He was to be the Saviour.

‘*Jesus went before them*’ means in the original that Jesus kept going and going in relentless obedience to Jerusalem. It is a picture of holy determination, a mind set which refuses to be distracted from His

The Gospel of Mark

mission. He was focused on a place – Jerusalem and Calvary's cross. All roads in the life of Christ led to Calvary. He was also focused on a plan – to give His life suffering and dying on behalf of needy sinners who put their trust in Him.

'Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you' 1 Peter 1.18-20.

Jesus was focused on a people – all those given to Him by the Father; it was to be a personal salvation.

'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' John 6.37

'...according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love' Ephesians 1.4.

As the disciples observed Him they were amazed and afraid; no one dared walk up alongside Him. Something about His demeanour and determination shook them. Their fear in the original has the meaning of 'to be seized with alarm', for here before them was the ultimate and perfect example of selfless sacrifice. They had left their livelihoods to follow Jesus and had made a sacrifice in so doing. Here was the Son of God, the Messiah made a Man, Who had left the glory of Heaven to live here on Earth, the One Who came as the Saviour of sinners to live a perfect life, and suffer, and die a sacrificial death. He had no place to call His own, nothing of this world's goods, and yet was at the same time its Creator.

Knowing the amazement of the disciples

Jesus took them aside on their own and told them again clearly

Leaving All to Follow Jesus

about His future sufferings. Jesus gave up Glory for a while to come to this Earth to suffer and die at Calvary as the one Sacrifice for sin. He says, 'We go up to Jerusalem.' This is not only referring to the geographical location, but this statement has a spiritual, saving meaning: 'I am going up to the Temple.' Rightly understood this should be the place to worship God. 'I am fulfilling the high calling of My Father – I will be lifted up on the cross.' He set His face steadfastly. Jesus went before them, He led the way to His suffering. He goes before us as Saviour – He leads and we follow.

- Jesus is the perfect example of Leadership. In the Dunkirk evacuation during World War II, the general led from a chateau!
- Jesus is the perfect example of commitment. He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem.
- Jesus is the perfect example of courage. There are two types of courage: immediate and premeditated. He exemplifies both.
- Jesus is the perfect example of love. Calvary is God's greatest sign of love.
- Jesus is the perfect example of obedience. He delighted to do His Father's will.
- Jesus is the perfect example of suffering. He came to that final moment to say, 'It is finished'.
- Jesus is the perfect example of assurance, shown through the resurrection.

Conclusion

Jesus is not calling us to do something that He was not prepared to do Himself. He is the Good Shepherd: He goes before His sheep. The question is, are we willing to follow Him?

37. THE MEASURE OF TRUE GREATNESS IS TO SERVE

Mark 10.35-45

This time was filled with deep significance. It was a time which called for quiet reflection like the time we spend at Communion quietly considering the sufferings of Jesus. But here, in contrast and in response to the solemn teaching on the sufferings of Jesus, we are told that James and John had a request. This request had nothing to do with suffering but all to do with position in Glory.

Personal ambition and self-confidence

‘And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldst do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory’ Mark 10.35-37.

James and John, together with Peter, had been privileged to witness the transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. They had seen a glimpse of His glory. It is evident by their request they did believe that Jesus was going to reign in Glory. Now they were concerned about their position in Glory. The fact that there are positions in Heaven is demonstrated by the response of Jesus a little later in verse 40:

‘...but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.’

What were some of the problems associated with their request?

- They were promoting themselves in a proud manner. They must have thought themselves worthy of such an honour. They wanted to stake their claim for the best seats with authority and responsibility.

The Gospel of Mark

Their request was made without really understanding what they were asking, just as a person might seek promotion without really appreciating the responsibility and pressure of the job.

- In the account in *Matthew* we are told their mother Salome supported them in the request. It was mixing human relationship with spiritual relationship. God calls us as individuals, not as families. Their mother was promoting her own children regardless of others.
- It was made with self confidence. They had not properly thought through the implications, and it reflected a hasty action. No doubt with a heavy heart Jesus said they would indeed taste of the cup of suffering and be immersed in it, like the psalmist.

‘Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul’ Psalm 124.4.

- It caused division, jealousy, and anger among the disciples. We are responsible for our actions. James and John had not thought through the hurt their request might cause others. Their desire was for themselves. Selfishness will always lead to dissension and division.

Christ’s teaching on service

What do you want Jesus to do for you? Are you willing to be saved to serve Him? Are you able in your own strength to suffer for Christ? Do you say, as James and John did, ‘I am able’?

Despite the problems with their attitude and request Jesus did not give up on James and John. Instead He changed them!

‘Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again. And

The Measure of True Greatness is to Serve

they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken' Luke 18.31-34.

Later it was Peter, James and John who went with Him to the Garden of Gethsemane.

'And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy' Mark 14.33.

They witnessed the suffering Servant in that garden. He taught them the true nature of greatness in God's sight. Consider how He worked in the heart of:

- Salome:

'There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome' Mark 15.40.

She did not see two thrones on either side of her Lord; she saw two thieves on two crosses either side of Jesus.

'And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him' Mark 16.1.

- James:

'And he killed James the brother of John with the sword' Acts 12.2.

- John learned the lesson of service:

'When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!' John 19.26.

'I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle

The Gospel of Mark

that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ' Revelation 1.9.

See also 1 John 3.1-6.

True greatness is found in humble service of others

'But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' Mark 10.42-45.

The self-promoting, self-confident request gave Jesus the opportunity to teach the disciples another valuable and timely lesson on the nature of true greatness in God's sight in God's Kingdom. Here we have a practical lesson on leadership according to God's principles. Jesus came to this world as a Servant, and all those who follow Him are called to serve Him in serving others. In the Kingdom of God true greatness is measured by our service, not by the number of servants under us. It is seen not in how high up the ladder we climb but how far down the ladder we are prepared to go in the service of others.

During World War II England needed to increase its production of coal. Winston Churchill called together Labour leaders to enlist their support. At the end of his presentation he asked them to picture in their minds a parade which he knew would be held in Piccadilly Circus after the War. First, he said, would come the sailors who had kept the vital sea lanes open. Then would come the soldiers who had come home from Dunkirk and then gone on to defeat Rommel in Africa. Then would come the pilots who had driven the Luftwaffe from the sky. Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-

The Measure of True Greatness is to Serve

streaked men in miner's caps. Someone would cry from the crowd, 'And where were you during the critical days of our struggle?' And from ten thousand throats would come the answer, 'We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal.'

Not all the jobs in a church are prominent and glamorous. But it is often the people with their 'faces to the coal' who help the church accomplish its mission. There is an old saying that the man who holds the ladder at the bottom is as important as the man at the top. Everybody wants to be the man at the top, but he would not be there very long without the assistance he receives from the man at the bottom. If he is wise the man at the top recognises the importance of the man at the bottom. If he does not, he may find his ladder slipping away. Jesus turns the value systems of the world upside-down. The life of disciples is marked by humility.

Application

Here we are given the perfect example of humble service.

'The Son of man' – the humanity of Jesus. He is a real Man, a real Person. He has two natures – human and divine.

'...not to be ministered unto, but to minister' – He came from Glory to serve others!

'...to give his life a ransom for many' – He paid the price to set His people free.

'I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty and joy to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. For the world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of tiny pushes of each honest worker.' Helen Keller

38. THE GREATEST QUESTION FROM OUR LORD

Mark 10.46-52

We now consider the greatest question our Lord asked: ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ This question can be asked of ourselves in the secret places of our heart. What would you like Jesus to do for you?

When I have been preaching in Indian villages the request from the children has been for an opportunity to learn English, the language seen as the gateway from poverty. Here young people may ask God to help them through their exams but do not want to follow Him as Lord. It is good to ask for God’s help in the practical things of life but if our request stops there it is really sad. There is so much more of real and eternal value that Jesus can do for you.

I remember reading of a person who was given three minutes to go around the supermarket and fill her trolley free of charge. You would think that woman very foolish if she arrived at the checkout with just a tube of toothpaste! There was so much more she could have had. Why didn’t she go to the delicatessen and get some of those beautiful pies and patès?

It is the whole-hearted answer of blind Bartimaeus to the question that I would like to consider. He understood something of the depth of Who Jesus was and what He could really do for him.

What Jesus did for Bartimaeus

a. His condition

‘And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging ‘ Mark 10.46.

The Gospel of Mark

Here was a man who was blind, destitute, despised, poverty stricken, and living off the leftovers from the people going by. We are given a vivid description of his position – sitting by the roadside begging. Bartimaeus had nothing materially to give. As a beggar he could only receive.

When it comes to salvation we receive forgiveness because of what God has done for us through Christ Jesus. Salvation is God's free gift to those who believe and trust in Jesus. When we consider salvation we must come to Jesus as Bartimaeus did, realising our helpless condition, unable to save ourselves. We depend totally upon God's grace to save us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

b. His cry

'And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me'
Mark 10.47.

Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside begging. A crowd was passing by; this day could be a good day for revenue. At first he may have thought, 'Just sit there and take the coins, Bartimaeus!' But the Spirit of God had prepared Bartimaeus for this day. The Spirit of God had worked in his mind and heart.

He had heard about Jesus of Nazareth. He had believed the accounts he had heard about Him, but now he shows real, living faith. Directly Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, we read he cried out for mercy. He cried out believing in Jesus as the Son of David. This means that Bartimaeus believed by faith that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He realised above all else he needed the mercy and compassion of Jesus in his life. Bartimaeus had a need, and with that need he called upon Jesus as his Saviour and Lord. So for our cry to Jesus to be effective we must believe Who He really is and that He is able to save.

The Greatest Question From Our Lord

c. His desire

‘And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me ‘ Mark 10.48.

Bartimaeus was told in no uncertain terms by those around Jesus to ‘shut up’, to stop his din and noise. How could he expect Jesus to be interested in a lowly, blind beggar? But Bartimaeus cried out even more. *‘Son of David, have mercy on me’.*

Here we can learn that obstacles and discouragements can actually work in a way to deepen our desire to have the real thing. Bartimaeus was calling upon the right Person, but in this cry he met opposition. If he had listened to the crowd he would have given up. So Satan tries to stop us crying out to God. He discourages us: ‘Why bother?’ But the continuation of our cry amidst opposition actually demonstrates the sincerity and reality of that cry and desire.

d. His call

‘And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee’ Mark 10.49.

We read about the remarkable authority of Jesus. He stood still and commanded him to be called. Jesus the Son of God stood still! What made the Son of God, the Creator of the universe, stand still? It was a cry for mercy that stopped Jesus in His tracks. This reminds us of the amazing compassion of Jesus. He was willing to stop to take time out of His schedule to take an interest in Bartimaeus who cried for mercy.

It is interesting to note that soon after this event, when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, the crowds took the lead from Bartimaeus and called out, *‘Hosanna to the Son of David’ (Matthew 21.9)*. However, there was something missing in their cry. It lacked two vital elements included in Bartimaeus’s cry. He cried out to *‘Jesus, thou Son of David’*. He cried

The Gospel of Mark

out for Him to *'have mercy on me'*. But then they were not looking to Jesus as a Person or for mercy from Him like Bartimaeus. They were not conscious of their need of a Saviour like Bartimaeus. His desire was deep and real. What do we want Jesus to do for us? How do we look to Jesus?

Blind Bartimaeus in his poverty was welcome to come to Jesus. Jesus commanded that he be called. This is a picture of the sovereign work of God in calling us out of darkness into His marvellous light. It is as an effective call, meaning that the call comes personally to us as an individual and has a blessed spiritual fruit. This call was personally for blind Bartimaeus: *'He calleth thee.'*

Jesus stood still and commanded Bartimeaus to be called. What relevance does this have to us? When you hear the message of the Gospel and the invitation to come to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, it is like the minister following the instruction of Jesus Who commands you to be called.

We read they went to Bartimeaus and said, *'Be of good comfort, rise, He calleth thee.'* So it is in the Gospel; the minister comes and calls you to arise and go to Jesus on the authority of His invitation. Remember this Jesus is the *'same yesterday, and to day, and for ever'* (Hebrews 13.8). It is the same Jesus now in Heaven Who called Bartimaeus and Zacchaeus too. He still calls individuals personally to Himself according to His grace. His power is not diminished in any way whatsoever.

His conversion pathway

'And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus'
Mark 10.50.

Now remember, Bartimaeus could not physically see Jesus, but he had heard about Him. He believed in what he had been told about the wonderful Person and work of Jesus Christ and was very eager to meet Jesus personally. He lost no time in responding to the call

The Greatest Question From Our Lord

and invitation of Jesus. He threw aside his garment demonstrating the need to be released from all hindrances to come to Jesus.

Remember the point here for our encouragement. We, like Bartimaeus, cannot see Jesus. Bartimaeus had not seen or touched Jesus. Nevertheless he came by faith believing in Jesus Whom he could not see with his eyes or feel with his hands. Actually, up to that point he had not even heard the Lord's physical voice, only the good news, *'the Master calleth thee'*. So Bartimaeus came to Jesus by faith based on what he had heard about Jesus, and encouraged by those who came to him and told him the good news that he was welcome to come to Jesus.

This is like the work of the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News that tells us that needy sinners like you and me, who physically cannot see Jesus, are welcome to come to Jesus as we believe in Him.

'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' John 6.37.

His clear desire

'And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight' Mark 10.51.

Bartimaeus is asked the great question by Jesus, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' Jesus wanted Bartimaeus to be very clear about what he really wanted Jesus to do for him. Did he want money; did he just want his sight to be restored; or did he want physical healing and true fellowship with Jesus? Did he want complete salvation?

This question reminds us of the problem of people who only want Jesus for what He can do for them physically and practically, and are not interested in what He can do for their souls. Jesus said on a previous occasion that there were those who were only following Him because of His miracle in providing the loaves and the fishes. Such

The Gospel of Mark

people have no desire to know Him, believe in Him or worship Him personally as Saviour and Lord. They only want God for material gain and physical wellbeing.

However, Jesus' question to Bartimaeus brought forth the cry of faith: *'Lord, that I might receive my sight'*. By that statement we see that Bartimaeus believed in Jesus as both Saviour and Lord. He desired not only the physical healing but spiritual fellowship with Jesus as Lord of his life. Jesus is the only One Who can give us both spiritual and physical healing. Here Bartimaeus received both. The *Gospel of Luke* confirms his healing was both physical and spiritual.

'And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee' Luke 18.42.

This double healing is also confirmed in the response of Bartimaeus. He followed Jesus, the evidence of his conversion. He gave glory to God, the ultimate objective of conversion.

What do you want Jesus to do for you?

We can answer this question in the secret place of our own heart. What do we want most of all in life? Friends, relationships, wealth, happiness, popularity, a good job, to be admired? Bartimaeus had to answer this question from Jesus for himself. No one else could answer it for him. His great desire was to know physical and spiritual healing. He wanted to see both physically and spiritually. He believed in Jesus and wanted to follow Him. Our greatest need is to know Jesus, and to know Him as Saviour and Lord of our lives.

What Jesus can do for you

Jesus is still able to heal in a miraculous way according to his good pleasure by the Holy Spirit and the perfect, sovereign will of God the Father. His power has not diminished in any way. However, the greatest work Jesus can do for us is not physical but spiritual. The miracle points to this fact. Jesus reminds us of this in the way He said –

The Greatest Question From Our Lord

'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' Mark 8.36.

Jesus can forgive our sins, He can give us spiritual and eternal life, and He can take us to Glory. Jesus can save us from the awful eternal consequences of unforgiven sin – an eternity in hell. Jesus came to this world as a Saviour: this was His great objective.

What can we do for Jesus?

What can we do for Jesus in return for the wonderful gift of salvation? We may follow Him, obey Him, acknowledge Him, praise Him, and serve Him.

Conclusion

It is significant that, just prior to this event where this great question was asked personally to Bartimaeus, the disciples had themselves asked Jesus to do for them whatever they asked Him. Jesus asked them exactly the same question as He had to Bartimaeus: *'What would ye that I should do for you?' (Mark 10.36)*. But the disciples' answer showed a proud desire to sit on the right and on the left side of Jesus in Glory. They coveted positions of greatness and authority!

Jesus explained that the truly great people in God's sight are those who serve, not those who are served. He supports this teaching by referring to His own personal ministry and work.

'For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' Mark 10.45.

From His perfect testimony we can learn that in God's sight true greatness is spiritual maturity which consists in the outpouring of self in service of others, and for the glory of God. To be great means to love and to serve others! The greatness of God's people does not depend upon position but on loving and serving in a spirit of humility, dependence and prayer. In the doctrine of Jesus 'being good to yourself' actually means trusting in Him and serving others.

39. ENTERING JERUSALEM

Mark 11.1-11

From His first breath to His last there was no turning back for Jesus. His life was one of utter and complete obedience to God His Father's will and purpose. Motivated by pure love and compassion for sinners, Jesus Christ lived and breathed salvation and grace. But also motivated by the honour of His Father in His own pure heart, Jesus condemned religious hypocrisy. So as He moved nearer towards Calvary, salvation and judgment were the two key areas of His witness.

We are told in Luke's account that He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem (*Luke 9.51*). Never have there been more purposeful footsteps of a Man than those walked by Jesus. Sometimes as Christian believers we follow God hesitantly, uncertainly, lethargically, or mechanically. But here Jesus sets the perfect example of committed obedience to God the Father's will.

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is also the perfect example of true leadership. Here is the Shepherd, the Son of God made Man, going before His followers, willingly walking to the cross, with every one of His sheep He would die for on His mind and heart. He says, *'I lay down my life for the sheep'* (*John 10.15*). I would like us to walk alongside the Son of God in this passage.

There are four particular aspects of His Person and teaching seen in this final journey towards Jerusalem: His authority, His adoration, His assessment, and His preparation.

His authority

'And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a

The Gospel of Mark

colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go' Mark 11.1-6.

Two of the disciples were sent by Jesus to fetch a colt for Him to ride upon. Jesus knew beforehand exactly where the colt would be tied and the reaction when the disciples led it away. He knew that no man had ridden on this colt before – like the tomb He would lay in, it was unused by another.

Several times in Scripture we see the divinity and deity of Jesus, the Son of God. He healed the sick, He calmed the storm, He made water into wine, He knew beforehand events to come, He knew what people were thinking before they spoke, and He knew the whereabouts of all His creatures. These are reminders for us.

The authority of Jesus can also be noted in a particular way in His words here, *'The Lord hath need of him'*. This sentence transcends any other plan, purpose, or motive. When the Lord needs to use something or someone, then His authority outweighs any other consideration. Our Lord has sovereign authority over all His creation. If He needs to use an animal for practical ministry, then He will do so. How much more challenging for us when our lives are affected personally: *'The Lord hath need of him'*! God may have need of your time, your possessions, or your service. How do we respond to this need?

'...and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need' Acts 2.45.

Now God can work independently, but He chooses to use means. He is sovereign in His choice of what means and whose means. He

Entering Jerusalem

has a plan and a purpose, and the greatest blessing is for us to be part of His plan either with ourselves personally, or with our personal possessions.

We can also observe the authority of Jesus in the way in which His words and actions perfectly harmonised with prophesy. (By prophesy we mean the preordained plan of God revealed in His Word, the Bible.) So Jesus did not suddenly decide to enter into Jerusalem riding on a colt – it was the preordained plan of God He should do so!

‘Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass’ Zechariah 9.9.

‘Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass’ Matthew 21.5.

The authority, obedience, and instruction of Jesus was complementing and fulfilling the prophecy.

The authority of Jesus was seen in a very practical manner. The colt was going to be borrowed and returned as a matter of honour and respect to its owner. This reminds us that as Christians part of our integrity and witness depends upon seemingly small matters, returning books we have borrowed, for example. The authority of our Christian witness is undermined by being careless in the practical matters of life.

In a positive manner, and always for our benefit, the Christian believer by faith realises and acknowledges that the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has a perfect authority over his life. This authority is not overbearing, tyrannical, making us nothing more than robots; rather it is an authority which is always for good, absolutely necessary, and gives God His proper place and right. We live in a world as it was in

The Gospel of Mark

the time of the Fall into sin in the Garden of Eden. We are encouraged by Satan to be as little gods; we imagine that we control our own destiny, forgetting how vulnerable we are. But a believer willingly accepts that the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has perfect authority over his life.

His adoration

'And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest' Mark 11.8-10.

What followed was an extraordinary scene. The entry into Jerusalem is very significant in its example and teaching, recorded in all four *Gospels*. The comments I make here are gleaned from all four *Gospels*.

The disciples first showed their respect for Jesus by putting their clothes on the colt for their Master's comfort. Clothes and tree branches were also strewn on the road by the crowd, acknowledging the authority of Jesus. Another multitude coming out to meet Jesus from Jerusalem lay down palm branches in His way. These actions were the equivalent of today's red carpet laid down for dignitaries.

The disciples who went with Jesus sang a song of praise. 'Hosanna' translated means 'save now'. What they said was true and to be commended. Luke records in his account that when the Pharisees told Jesus to stop them singing such words He replied that the stones would cry out if they stopped (*Luke 19.40*). He meant it would be impossible to restrain the disciples, and improper to attempt it. However, their understanding of 'save now' was still limited as became apparent after the death of Jesus.

Entering Jerusalem

But there was also another crowd that looked to Jesus as a national saviour, willing to make Him a king but for political reasons alone. They were not praising Him as the Saviour for their soul, but for Him to be a deliverer from the Romans. They quoted from *Psalms 118*, a Messianic Psalm, without making the proper application.

'Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity' Psalms 118.25.

They failed to connect it to the spiritual reality of *Isaiah 53*. If they had remembered *Matthew 1.21*,

'And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins'

they would have known that what Jesus had come to do was not political but spiritual; it had to do with salvation. Their words of adoration of Jesus were undoubtedly true up to a point, but their understanding of those words was still limited to time, to politics, to providence, and to an earthly leader.

This is an example of them being closed in their minds to the evidence before their eyes. Here the entry into Jerusalem harmonised perfectly with prophesy of this event. The Word of God and the events unfolding before their eyes matched together. But Jesus must match their materialistic ambitions, not the spiritual, so when later the crowd realised Jesus was not fulfilling their aspirations, they shouted, 'Crucify Him!'

Here we arrive at one of the crucial reasons as to why we praise God. Why do we want the help of God in our life? Millions of people call upon God to save them for physical and emotional reasons alone, while at the same time neglecting their greatest need in the soul. While all who praised Jesus were using the same words, only a remnant came close to the meaning of 'Hosanna'. Is our cry, 'Save now!', for reasons which include our spiritual welfare?

The Gospel of Mark

How did their limited attitude affect Jesus?

'And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it' Luke 19.41.

We have a weeping King in the midst of a shouting multitude. The multitude was not concerned about their spiritual welfare, only their practical wellbeing. In the end this is borne out by their change within a short while, shouting, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!'

Jesus entered Jerusalem in this manner to fulfil prophesy, knowing also that the praise of the disciples and actions of the crowds would stir up the religious leaders. They responded by saying, 'Look! the whole world has gone after Him', so they schemed to destroy Him. The point here is that all things were working together to accomplish the overall divine purposes of God.

His assessment

'And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve' Mark 11.11.

There is a very interesting comment on the actions of Jesus found in verse 11. Jesus came into the city of Jerusalem in the evening. He entered the Temple and simply looked around Him. He took it all in. His Father's house had been turned into a market place. The god of money had taken its place in the Temple area. The House of Prayer had become a den of thieves.

'Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves' Mark 11.17.

The outcome of His assessment was seen the next day. There is a warning for us all here; it says Jesus looked around at *'all things'*. Here we are reminded of the all searching eye of Jesus!

'And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter' Luke 22.61.

Entering Jerusalem

Anywhere and everywhere Jesus in Heaven sees and hears. This can serve as a comfort and as a warning. How does Jesus assess the situation we are in? I expect the money changers in the Temple expected their trade to continue without interruption. Business was good, money was being made. They knew how to count money but had not counted on the intervention of the Son of God. He weighed them in the balances and found them wanting. Jesus assesses our situation with perfect wisdom and knowledge. He stands before us as both Judge and Saviour. The One Who knows also says, '*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*' (Matthew 11.28).

His preparation

Even our Lord took time to consider a situation before taking action. He knew the challenges that lay ahead; where better to go than to His friends at Bethany? Here was a place of fellowship, a place of spiritual refreshment. Jesus reminds us of the importance of preparation, to prepare body, mind and soul before entering into a challenging and testing situation.

Conclusion

We are given this account of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem which demonstrates His perfect leadership. Here is a Man we can trust, a Man dedicated to the cause of His people, a Man Who sees things through to the end. Who better to trust than King Jesus?

40. PROFESSION, PRACTICE, AND PRAYER

Mark 11.12-26

Jesus had made a triumphant and yet tearful entry into Jerusalem. He had assessed the situation in the Temple and returned for the night to Bethany. Now in the morning He came back into Jerusalem. In the distance He saw a fig tree in leaf giving the outward appearance of having fruit. Even though it was not the season for figs this tree was unusual in that it promised fruit by its leaves. Jesus would have appreciated the comfort and sustenance of some figs on His way to Jerusalem. On the basis of the outward appearance Jesus expected to find fruit, but when He made His inspection He found nothing but leaves!

We might wonder why Jesus, as the Son of God, did not know beforehand that there was no fruit. Sometimes Jesus worked within the limits of His humanity as a Man, as in this instance. At other times He chose to work in the infinite supernatural power of His deity.

Profession without possession

‘And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it’ Mark 11.12-14.

The fig tree was a picture of false advertising. The problem Jesus is pointing to here is that the fig tree had leaves but no fruit. The leaves said, ‘There is fruit here’, but the figs were not there. This tree came under the judgment of Jesus because it professed to have something which it did not have. It had a profession without possession.

The Gospel of Mark

Now as we look at this judgment of the fig tree from a humanistic point of view it seems the reaction of Jesus is way over the top. We perhaps in our minds criticise Jesus for destroying one tree while at the same time mankind uses millions at Christmas. However, we know from the Word of God that Jesus was perfect, so this action by Him was absolutely necessary to teach a fundamentally important lesson.

When you read in the Word of God something you cannot comprehend, faith must rest in the all-wise God. Jesus is the One Who has total control over all that He has created. We know the Word of God tells us that all Creation groans and suffers through the Fall of man (*Romans 8.22*).

Here Jesus used this worthless fig tree for a worthwhile purpose, and taught a profound warning to the Jews. This tree symbolised perfectly the state of the nation and religious establishment of the Jews. The pretentious tree without fruit had its counterpart in the state of religion at the Temple. The Temple, viewed from the outside, was beautiful and impressive. It had a gold roof, and the outside walls were white; it could be seen for miles around. The Temple in Herod's day was vast and one of the wonders of the known world in architecture. When the sun rose in the morning its rays bounced off the gold roof dazzling those looking at it. On the outside it was beautiful and impressive, but what was going on inside was corrupt and fruitless. So it was with the religious leaders of the day – Jesus called them whited sepulchres, spiritually dead (*Matthew 23.27*).

The *Queen Mary* was the largest ship to cross the oceans when she was launched in 1936. Through 1936-1967, including a World War, she served until she was retired, anchored as a floating hotel and museum in Long Beach, California. During the conversion, her three massive smoke-stacks were taken off to be scraped down and repainted. But on the dock they crumbled. Nothing was left of the

Profession, Practice and Prayer

3/4-inch steel plate from which the stacks had been formed. All that remained were more than thirty coats of paint that had been applied over the years. The steel had rusted away. When Jesus called the Pharisees whitewashed tombs, He meant they had no substance, only an exterior appearance. They had a beautiful religious building like a cathedral, but at the same time they were plotting to overthrow and kill Jesus. So, as Jesus knew and observed what was going on inside of the Temple and their hearts, today the Lord sees each one of us and knows whether or not the inside harmonises with the outside.

The question of spiritual fruitfulness is one of immense seriousness, which we ignore at our peril. There comes a time when Jesus will make His own personal assessment of our lives! That happened to Adam and Eve. God does not approve when there is profession without reality, talk without walk.

Some years ago a remarkable picture was exhibited in London. From a distance you seemed to see a monk engaged in prayer, his hands clasped, his head bowed. As you came nearer, however, and examined the painting more closely you saw that in reality he was squeezing a lemon into a punch bowl! What a picture that is of the human heart. Superficially examined, it is thought to be the seat of all that is good and noble and pleasing in a man, whereas in reality, until regenerated by the Holy Spirit, it is the seat of all corruption.

'And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil' John 3.19.

The Jewish nation to a large extent failed to heed this warning of Jesus. Some years later the judgment Jesus predicted through the withered fig tree came to pass – Jerusalem was destroyed. They were incredibly religious yet spiritually fruitless. Jerusalem was the religious centre of the world; it promised much but gave nothing of spiritual value to those who came seeking it.

The Gospel of Mark

Practice without possession

'And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine. And when even was come, he went out of the city' Mark 11.15-19.

Remember, Jesus had assessed the situation the evening before. He had carefully thought through the best way in which to deal with this problem. Here we are given a picture of Jesus the Judge, the One Who has authority to say exactly what should and should not be.

'Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people' Isaiah 56.7.

What was the problem here? The religious establishment were profiteering in the Temple from an extortionate exchange rate. Every Jewish male had to pay a yearly Temple tax, an amount equalling two days' pay. But it had to be paid in the currency of the Temple: therein lay the problem. The extortionate exchangers would change your money for the Temple currency.

Then Jesus also exposed the abuse of the sale of doves for sacrificial purposes. Doves could be purchased in the market for a small sum but the only doves accepted by the priests for sacrifice were those purchased in the Temple. These were sold for fifteen times the price in the market. So the house of prayer had become a den of thieves;

Profession, Practice and Prayer

hypocrisy ruled. Their practice showed they had no real spiritual possession – their actual god was money.

Additionally there was a place to exchange goods (see verse 16). The Temple court was being used as a short cut from the eastern part of the city to the Mount of Olives. A profitable trade had been set up to engage with the passing customers. People passed through the Temple precincts but paid scant attention to real worship.

Worship on the Lord's Day can be like that for us, just passing through the Lord's house thinking about the rest of the day; a duty to perform, passing through, no settled rest in the Lord. In the end Jesus will judge a church which is not spiritually minded. The church should never be a place where people are allowed to practise or use it for their own ends.

What was so bad about the Pharisees' hypocrisy? If we think of it as only in their teaching, or pretending one thing while practising something contradictory, we will miss Jesus' main point. What He revealed was that they were using God and the things of God as a means to some other end. That is what was insidious about the Pharisees' example.

Theirs was a problem of priorities: their first priority was social status to which end God was but a means. What greater affront to God could there be? Better to ignore Him altogether than to exploit Him as a means to something else you value more highly.

Instead of using the opportunity to reach people spiritually, they used the opportunity to 'fleece' people. Note *Matthew 21.12-17*. The Temple was meant to be a place where people from all nations could worship God. The Jews guarded it not for doctrinal reasons but for personal and selfish reasons. Matthew Henry says:

'Christ will have the Temple, as a type of the Gospel-church, for "*whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved*"'

The Gospel of Mark

Now this action of Jesus in judgment for the sake of the honour of His Father's name would cost Him his life, humanly speaking (see verse18).

Remember the Church is being watched by the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

'And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength' Revelation 1.12-16.

There are times when our Lord will have to cleanse us in our attitudes and actions. This will involve turning over some tables in our heart.

Prayer with possession

'And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Profession, Practice and Prayer

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. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses' Mark 11.20-26.

Now the next morning the disciples saw the fig tree all dried up from the roots, dead and withered away. So Jesus uses this event to teach another truth, the secret of prayer for possession.

'Have faith in God.' Faith: Jesus makes it clear that true faith is not faith in faith, but faith in God. Faith is trust, confidence and reliance upon God. It is meant in the objective sense here. It reminds us we must take our needs and our cares to God in prayer. It speaks of access, right desires, leading to answers to prayer.

One of the great tests of a situation is whether we can sincerely pray to God about it. If we take it to God, are we willing to accept God's answer?

'Be thou removed.' Expectation: Note Elijah's example.

'And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not' 1 Kings 18.44.

'Mountain' was a popular figure of speech for any insurmountable problem in Jewish culture. For example, if a professor helped a student work out a problem this was described as removing a mountain. It was a phrase used to describe removing difficulties. The promise is made here to the disciples. It does not mean that if you pray hard enough God is obligated to answer you, no matter what you ask. Our prayers are answered only as they harmonise with the will of God in our life. Nothing is impossible for God when He chooses to work in partnership with the prayer made in faith.

The Gospel of Mark

'If you do not forgive.' Attitude: Along with the prayer of faith and expectation must be a willingness to forgive others.

Now it is interesting that Jesus should speak about forgiveness here in the context of doing the impossible. The greatest mountain in our life is our sin. If we confess our sin, God is ready and willing to forgive us our sin (*1 John 1.9*). God is ready and willing to forgive us in Jesus Christ. But at the same time we cannot expect forgiveness while maintaining a bitter and unforgiving spirit to others. If a person acknowledges their sin, it is our duty towards them to forgive them. The confusion on this matter only arises when there is a denial or refusal to acknowledge the sin on the part of the person to be forgiven.

41. QUESTIONING AND REJECTING GOD THE SON

Mark 11.27-12.9

Questioning the authority of the Son of God

And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things' Mark 11.27-33.

The religious leaders attempt to regain the initiative by questioning the authority of Jesus. The leaders who came to Jesus were members of the so-called Sanhedrin Council. They included:

Chief priests: These were the elite group surrounding the High Priest who themselves had previously served as High Priest.

Scribes: These were the researchers, teachers, writers, interpreters, and theologians.

Elders: These were the religious leaders who went out of Jerusalem to the outlying towns to lead in the synagogues.

It is likely that, at the time of this intervention, Jesus was in the

The Gospel of Mark

Temple for the purpose of teaching. It is noted He was walking, meaning walking to the next group waiting to be taught, or teaching as He walked. Jesus never ever walked aimlessly about – every step of our Lord was for a pure purpose.

As He walked the leaders came up to Him, directly interrupting Him to aggressively fire two questions at Him:

1. By what authority do you do these things?
2. Who gave you the authority to do these things?

They had been bruised by the actions of Jesus cleansing the Temple and the manner of His entry into Jerusalem. They were jealous of His following, the evident blessing of His ministry, and impact upon the people, for they had stated previously in their frustration, *'Behold, the world is gone after him'* (John 12.19). They attempted to usurp Jesus' authority by challenging Him.

We see the blindness of unbelief in these religious leaders in Jerusalem. For three years Jesus had taught with authority and power; He had healed many and done many amazing works. He had demonstrated signs and wonders in the truest sense of the word. He had laid down the fundamental principles of the Gospel of God in Himself as the Saviour, the Messiah. Flying in the face of the evidence they challenged Jesus as though He was a common upstart, a self-appointed man.

In response the all-wise Jesus answered them in a way which demonstrates their weak, untenable position. Here Jesus showed the futility of it by appealing to John.

'The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me.'

If they acknowledged John was a prophet and his authority was from Heaven then they would also have to acknowledge Jesus for Who He was, for John's ministry was clearly to declare Him, and John the Bap-

Questioning and Rejecting God the Son

tist was bold in proclamation of Christ. But if they said John was not a prophet, the people would rise up in protest and possibly even stone them, for the common people were sure John was a prophet and these religious leaders were afraid to oppose them. So we are given their pathetic response: ‘*We cannot tell*’ – ‘We do not know.’

Is it not sad when religious leaders today depart from the Word and end up with a pathetic and weak witness? Recently I was watching a DVD of some research done on a very well-known preacher from the USA who claims to be Reformed in doctrine. However, he holds to the fundamental error of theistic evolution. When the interviewer stated that, if he held this view, it would mean there was death before the Fall, he replied, ‘I do not know.’ In addition, he described the issue of Adam and Eve in the context of theistic evolution as being the ‘messy bit’.

Whenever Jesus, the Son of God, and His Word are rejected by religious leaders it always leads to confusion. The only sound foundation is the Word of God – the only stable position is to have faith in His Word. We may not understand all about the ‘how’ and the ‘why’, but God is not under any obligation to reveal all to us. Part of true spiritual maturity and growth is to humble ourselves before the living God and simply trust Him.

‘Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me’ Job 42.1-4.

Here in Jerusalem Jesus, the Son of God, was before the religious leaders as the Truth, the Lord, and the Saviour. But in their spiritual ignorance they treated Jesus impolitely and disrespectfully, revealing their unbelief. A lesson here for us is never to consider in our pride

The Gospel of Mark

that we can put God on trial and demand answers from Him. Never say in your heart, 'I will not believe unless I understand,' or, 'Truth is not truth unless I accept it.' Thomas had to learn this lesson.

'But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed' John 20.24-29.

To bring home the truth of the situation about the religious leaders and the state of the Jewish nation, Jesus related a parable, the significance of which the rulers could not fail to understand. The picture Jesus used was common to that day and age. Wealthy Jewish land-owners or Roman investors would buy up land and cultivate it to produce wine. It was seen at that time as one of the popular and safe investments. But revolts by tenant farmers were not uncommon and this story would have resonated clearly with His hearers.

Rejecting God the Son

a. God's care

'And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower' Mark 12.1a.

Questioning and Rejecting God the Son

Jesus presented a picture of a vineyard being planted with great care. It had a security fence all around the site. A wine trough was dug out of the rock to enable the grapes to be trodden. Beneath it another trough would receive the juice to be filtered and stored in a cool place. A watch tower was built with a twentyfour-hour guard. The vineyard in the parable of Jesus had the best equipment, the best site, and the best opportunity for fruitfulness.

Jesus used picture language to describe the way in which God provided and cared for the Jewish nation. God attended to every detail, and ensured the well-being of the vineyard of the Jewish nation.

Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry' Isaiah 5.1-7.

God is a generous God. Just think, even in providence, of the glorious Creation He has provided for the world in His common grace!

The Gospel of Mark

But even more importantly, God provides for the well-being of the Church with His Word. A vital question is how do we work in the God's vineyard and respect the authority of its Owner?

b. God's delegation

'...and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country'
Mark 12.1b.

The investment was then leased out to a manager who appointed workers to tend the vines and pick the fruit. The husbandman, or manager, refers here to the rulers of Israel throughout the history of the nation. Some were faithful but sadly many were not. Here we are reminded of the awesome responsibility of being involved in a ministry delegated to us by God. God is in a far country – Heaven – and delegates the care of His vineyard to husbandmen. It is a great privilege and responsibility to lead in a way which will be spiritually fruitful. God has called and entrusted leaders to work on His behalf. He does not use robots, but delegates these duties to human beings who are responsible to their Owner. Sadly here we are given a picture of unfaithful husbandmen and workers who were just out for themselves.

c. The treatment of God's servants

'And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some'
Mark 12.2-5.

The next group of people we are told of are those who are called God's servants, the prophets, who over hundreds of years had faithfully

Questioning and Rejecting God the Son

preached God's Word to the Jewish nation. They had faithfully warned the wayward rulers and the nation. They had God-given authority and yet they were treated in a despicable manner. Note the words of Jesus in *Matthew 23.29-30*:

'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye... say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.'

The lease rental in those days was paid by a proportion of the fruit being handed over to the owner of the vineyard. Here, on a number of occasions, the owner sent his servants, referring to the Old Testament prophets, to collect the fruit. Spiritually applied it means for the Lord to receive the spiritual fruit of repentance, faith, worship, praise, obedience, and service, according to His gracious provision; to acknowledge Him as the Lord of our lives; and give Him the honour due to His worthy name. But each time God sent His servants the prophets, they were either shamefully treated or killed.

Spiritually applied one cannot fail to see the picture of God's long-suffering nature in the Old Testament times. Time and time again He sent His prophets to preach, to warn and foretell, but such were constantly rejected. Jeremiah was thrown into a miry pit, a dungeon, because the people wanted to hear smooth things. The truth of the Word of God was too straight for them, too challenging, for it disturbed their compromise.

'And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better

The Gospel of Mark

*thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.
Hebrews 11.36-40*

d. The treatment of God's Son

*'Having yet therefore one son, his wellbeloved, he sent him also
last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son' Mark 12.6.*

Finally in the parable the owner decides, in his mercy and compassion, despite the unbelief and rebellion, to send his one and only beloved son saying, 'Surely they will respect my son.' Here we see the terrible fruit of unbelief and rebellion. This is where rebellion and unbelief find their epicentre, for here in the parable Jesus spoke about His death. The rejection of God's only beloved Son is the epicentre of unbelief against God – rejecting God's love.

In just a few days from this event Jesus, God's only begotten Son, was going to be killed on a cross. In His position before them He was the Son of God; He stood before them with the authority of God. He knew what lay before Him, and He told them what they were going to do to Him. He was the stone which the builders rejected.

They looked at His life: it was perfect. They looked at His miracles: they were amazing. They looked at His teaching: it was wonderful. They looked at His lifestyle: it was humble. In spite, and in the face of, all the evidence, they rejected Him not because they could find any imperfection but simply because He did not measure up to what they wanted as a political, materialistic leader. He was not one of them! He had not come to call the self-righteous to position and importance, but sinners to repentance. They called Him the Friend of sinners. They rejected Jesus because they wanted a kingdom and leader to promote their national interests alone.

The reason why so little is known about Jesus is because we do not submit to Him as Saviour and Lord. The psalmist David knew much of the Lord because he prayed, *'Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God' Psalm 143.10.*

Questioning and Rejecting God the Son

e. God's judgment

'What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others' Mark 12.9.

The great privilege of presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world was first given to the Jews. But it is taken away from them because of their rejection of it and now given to the New Testament Church. The Jews lost their privileged status as a nation in their rejection of the Messiah. Unbelief, rebellion, and rejection of God and His only beloved Son will have its final judgment.

But the rejection of Jesus Christ by the Jewish leaders could not halt the wonderful growth of God's Church. Several times the converted Jewish apostles took the message of the Gospel first to the Jews but, on their rejection of it, went on to preach to the Gentiles and the Gospel continued to spread.

Today if we deny the Lord and fail to honour His name and proclaim His name according to God's Gospel, God will take away that privilege from us and give it to another because God's Kingdom will continue to grow. This is why many liberal churches which have denied the Word of God and deity of Jesus Christ have closed, while others no longer have the privilege of proclaiming the Gospel but serve the cause of spiritual darkness.

42. GOD'S CORNERSTONE – CHRIST JESUS

Mark 12.10-11

'And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?' Mark 12.10-11.

God's victory in Christ Jesus the Cornerstone

Jesus now quotes from *Psalm 118*.

'The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes' *Psalm 118.22-23*.

This refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The rejected stone – Jesus Christ the Messiah – has been exalted. God has overruled according to His perfect will. Is this marvellous in your eyes? The mystery, the power, the wisdom, the ways, and the sovereignty of God making Jesus Christ, His only Beloved Son, the chief Cornerstone, the Head and foundation of the Church?

The chief cornerstone is a symbolic reference to the chief foundation stone of the Temple. This stone, laid deep down at the foundation, was the first and most important stone laid, and the building rested upon it. It was the stone that all the other stones in the building are aligned to – that is the principle point. If that is misaligned it follows the whole will be misaligned. Always examine the foundation!

Jesus Christ, the chief Cornerstone, is the chief stone in perfect position and alignment on which the whole edifice of the Church rests. The Apostles built the doctrine upon the teaching of Christ.

'And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone' *Ephesians 2.20*.

The Gospel of Mark

Paul in his teaching keeps coming back to Christ. So for the Church today Christ is the chief Cornerstone. We rest on Him; we are aligned to Him, attached to Him, and depend upon Him.

What or who is the foundation stone of our life?

What is the focal point of our life? My first car was a Mini. It was my pride and joy. One day while I was at work it was stolen. I was distraught! It was my life!

We are reminded of the parable of Jesus regarding the houses built on the sand and on the rock. What is the foundation stone of our life? I knew once of a house that kept developing cracks. After much investigation it was found to be built over a mine shaft, lacking a sure foundation.

Do we have an immovable, unchangeable, faithful, lasting satisfaction? Then we are wise. In these verses we have set out just such a foundation for our lives – Jesus Christ the chief Cornerstone.

‘Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner’ 1 Peter 2.7.

Christ the Cornerstone of Creation

The Bible is God’s Word to mankind. God has given His account of Creation in the very first chapter. This simple account of Creation has not been altered, adapted or adjusted. It has come from the beginning of time, from Adam, the first man to be created, down to us today. It was confirmed by the Holy Spirit to Moses, who wrote the *Book of Genesis* approximately 3,500 years ago. It has stood the test of time. Fundamental to Creation is Christ Jesus as the Cornerstone.

‘For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him’ Colossians 1.16.

God's Cornerstone – Christ Jesus

'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds' Hebrews 1.1-2.

Christ was there at the beginning of time! The work of Creation is aligned to its Creator in Christ Jesus.

Christ the Cornerstone of life's values

*'In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'
Colossians 2.3.*

Christ is the perfect example of life. He lived out what He taught to perfection. God in His Word, the Bible, sets out the real principles behind life and how we should live. We should love God and one another; be forgiving; be giving; pray for one another; and be holy.

Jesus Christ was the perfect demonstration of God's values for living. He is the perfect Cornerstone to align our life to – it is an exercise for life.

Christ the Cornerstone of salvation

'Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved' Acts 4.12.

We are not saved by our religion, by a denomination, or by being baptised, confirmed, or christened. We are not saved by our good deeds, our name, or our family. We are saved by believing in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God, in His great love, sent His Son Who lived a perfect and holy life. He then suffered on the cross at Calvary. He gave His life in perfect submission as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all who believe in Him. God's holiness and justice demanded a sacrifice for sin; sin had to be dealt with; sin had to be accounted for as a great debt. Forgiveness for sin is obtained in and through the

The Gospel of Mark

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So Paul wrote, *'For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified'* (1 Corinthians 2.2).

There is a book written about the things people have said just before they died. No one has ever said on their death bed, 'I regret having Jesus as my Saviour', but thousands have said, 'I regret the sin in my life and following the dictates of the devil.'

Christ the Cornerstone of peace

'But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us' Ephesians 2.13-14.

Christ is the only way to peace with God. Christ is the foundation and reference point for peace between believers.

Christ the Cornerstone of judgment

'In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel' Romans 2.16.

The Bible teaches us of a Judgment Day when Christ will judge the world, a time when His true and perfect judgment will emanate from His perfect wisdom of all matters. Oh to be found in Him, clothed in His righteousness and not our own, secure under His precious redeeming blood!

Christ the Cornerstone of the Church

Satan attacks with greatest force the name of Christ Jesus! I read recently that a new West End comedy is seeking a stropky teenager to play the Lord, and the candidate could be a girl, or an atheist, or someone of another religion who has a real hatred for Christ! Satan goes straight for the foundation, for the chief Cornerstone. If this can be damaged then the Church becomes out of alignment. Christ is fundamental to the Church and to knowing God. Without Christ

God's Cornerstone – Christ Jesus

there would be no Church, no hope. It is upon Christ that the apostles wrote the doctrine of the Church.

'For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ' 1 Corinthians 3.11.

Christ the Cornerstone is set before you. Do you receive or reject Him? Believe in Him and you will not be mistaken. Christ will not let you down or prove to be a myth or a false foundation.

'Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded' 1 Peter 2.6.

God the Father has set His Son as the Head of the Church.

'This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes' Psalm 118.23.

The word 'marvellous' here means something to be wondered at, overwhelmed by, or humbled by. The One rejected by man is the very One ordained by God to be Saviour and Lord.

43. MORE QUESTIONS

Mark 12.13-27

‘And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar’s. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marvelled at him’ Mark 12.13-17.

The religious rulers had been questioning Jesus about His authority and had been silenced by His wisdom. They had also been challenged by the parable, about their past, current, and future rejection of God and His Son. But Jesus now faces more questioning from others to do with life now and life after death.

Now we know that questions can be given positively for good reasons – to learn and be instructed, to get a better understanding of a situation, or to discuss a matter. Questions can be healthy and should be encouraged. But questions can also be put in a negative manner, to find fault, criticise, catch a person out, or condemn. This was the spirit in which Jesus was being questioned at this time: *‘to catch him in his words.’*

‘Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk’ Matthew 22.15.

‘And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign

The Gospel of Mark

themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor' Luke 20.20.

A question about life now

There is a history behind this loaded question. Herod the Great had ruled Palestine as a Roman tributary king. He was loyal to the Romans; they respected him and gave him a lot of freedom. When he died in 4BC it was arranged that the kingdom of Palestine be divided into three. Herod Antipas ruled over the Galilee region; Herod Philip ruled the wild north-east region; and Herod Archelaus was given rule over Judea and Samaria.

While Antipas and Philip ruled wisely and well, Archelaus was a complete failure. The result was that the Romans had to step into this region of Judea and Samaria and introduce direct rule. A consequence of that was that tribute tax was paid in Judea and Samaria direct to the Emperor. The coinage used was Roman, and stamped upon it was an inscription honouring the Emperor Caesar. On one side of the coin was an inscription stating that Caesar was the son of the divine Augustus. The reverse side of the coin had an inscription declaring that Caesar was high priest. In other words, he was the ruler politically and spiritually.

Payment of the tax reminded the Jews they were under Roman rule. It was intended to remind the Jews of the self-declared divinity of the emperor in matters practical and spiritual. The coin was a state sign of power. The point of the question was to trap Jesus either into being disloyal to the Jewish people, who hated the tax and despised the emperor, or to be disloyal to the Roman rule and Caesar who insisted upon the tax. The Pharisees and the Herodians thought they had successfully trapped Jesus in an inescapable dilemma.

Note how the Pharisees and the Herodians came together in this

More Questions

attack upon Jesus. The Pharisees were deeply religious, self-righteous hypocrites relying upon ceremony and restrictive laws. The Herodians were secular, immersed in pagan art and culture, but at the same time they observed Jewish ceremony. This reminds us that worldliness and religious hypocrisy are really one and the same thing.

Their common cause here was their united attempt to destroy Jesus.

‘The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed’ Psalm 2.2.

The denial of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the one issue which unites all other religions against Christianity. It is the uniting motive for error and heresy in the professing church. Whatever the differences of religious and secular groups on other matters, here is one issue they can unite around.

The second matter we can note in their questioning is the manner in which they flatter Jesus first. This was to cover the barbed question which followed. They acknowledged the integrity of Jesus and that He taught the truth about God, calling Him Teacher, or Master. They acknowledged that He was consistent in His approach to all people. They appeared to commend, and then attempted to catch Him, dropping their loaded question.

‘He, knowing their hypocrisy.’ The approach of this group to Jesus was two-faced. They pretended to do one thing while intending to do another.

‘Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves’ Matthew 7.15.

In answer to their question Jesus demonstrated both wisdom and authority (verse 17). He knew their hypocrisy and loaded question for there is nothing hidden from Him.

‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.’ Honouring God does not mean dishonouring the emperor in terms of any legitimate earthly

The Gospel of Mark

power. Refusing to pay tax for the cost of the infrastructure and order needful in society is not a good witness. At this particular time the Roman rule had brought stability and tranquillity to the region. A responsibility to contribute practically to the welfare of the society in which we live is implied. We are taught here to respect those in authority over us.

'...for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty' 1 Timothy 2.2.

'Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme...' 1 Peter 2.13.

One of the ways in which we honour God is the way we respect our responsibilities as citizens of the nation. For the Jews to use Roman coinage to pay tax was honourable – this was one of the points Jesus made. For us in the here-and-now it means paying the proper taxes due to the government of the day. But always remember to render to God the things which are God's. The emperor and government must be given what is due in monetary terms. This relates to the payment of tax and submission to their limited, earthly, practical authority. However the honour which is due to God alone must be given only to God.

'For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods' Psalm 95.3.

An earthly king or government is respected by paying the tax for a period of time. Their honour is limited to material time matters. They are due a sum, and it should be paid. However any claim to divinity, as indicated on the Roman coin, had no authority whatsoever. Only material debt must be rendered unto Caesar, but God must be honoured in worship from the heart for time and for eternity.

An image of a man was stamped on a metal coin; God's image is

stamped on the heart of a human being. The image of God is stamped upon all people of whatever race and nation. Sin has marred the image terribly; nevertheless there are traces of God's image that remain to remind us. When a person is converted God's image is renewed and stamped upon that person in Christ Jesus.

'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness' Ephesians 4.24.

Whereas the image of Caesar is stamped upon the coin for a short time, God's image is stamped eternally upon a sinner saved by grace in Christ Jesus.

The only proper response to this reality is to bow in submission to our Maker, to acknowledge His supreme authority over our lives, which superabounds even Caesar. With one sentence Jesus exposed the truth about His enemies and demolished their attempts to trick Him. He put the question of living under Caesar in its proper place. Money is a distant second behind the more important question of living under the Kingdom of God. Remember there are two different kingdoms, but the essential one for our eternal wellbeing is God's Kingdom.

A question about life hereafter

'Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the

The Gospel of Mark

scriptures, neither the power of God? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err' Mark 12.18-27.

Notice here the intensity of the attacks upon Jesus. First the chief priests, the elders, the teachers of the law, then the Pharisees, followed by the Herodians; and now the Sadducees. Each party was attempting to trip Him up and condemn Him in one way or another.

The Sadducees were a small group of people from whom the High Priest was selected. They were specifically responsible for the Temple which Jesus had just cleansed, so they had already been severely challenged by Jesus. Their question was not an attempt to trick Jesus but rather to ridicule His teaching. Their question related to the resurrection from the dead. This was a truth they refused to believe and rejected it out of hand. But Jesus not only believed and taught this doctrine; He had, as the Son of God and through the mighty power of God, actually demonstrated its reality. He is the Resurrection and the Life. Lazarus, in this context, was raised from the dead.

'Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already' John 11.17.

'And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes' John 11.43-44.

The Sadducees presented to Jesus an unlikely scenario to attempt to disprove the resurrection. Here we see the danger of going to extremes to try to prove a point. This was a clever question that no

More Questions

doubt this group had used before. It is like the questions people put up to attempt to disprove God's creation or God's sovereignty.

Jesus demonstrated that there are times when a firm approach is required: *'Ye therefore do greatly err.'* Remember Jesus is speaking to religious leaders who claim knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. They are pleased to quote a part which suits them, while leaving out a part they refuse to believe.

'If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger: her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the firstborn which she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother which is dead, that his name be not put out of Israel' Deuteronomy 25.5-6.

Theirs is a 'pick and mix' attitude. The Sadducees claimed to accept as a whole the first five books of the Bible, so in answer to their question Jesus quotes from one of these books.

'Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God' Exodus 3.6.

He said, 'I remain the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'

'Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable...accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure' Hebrews 11.12,19.

He was saying, 'These men are still alive but now in glory. I remain their God in a living, real way.' Jesus rebuked the Sadducees for their lack of knowledge of the Scriptures.

'Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh

The Gospel of Mark

also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore' Psalm 16.9-11.

'If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come' Job 14.14.

'For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me' Job 19.25-27.

'As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness' Psalm 17.15.

He also rebuked them for their lack of personal experience of the power of God. In other words the Sadducees had a very low view of Scripture as the inspired Word of God. They had no desire or experience of its spiritual power to change their lives and transform their thinking. The Sadducees were wrong. Jesus would not compromise one iota with those who deny the resurrection. There are non-negotiable truths, and this was one of them. Behind their error lay ignorance of both the Word of God and His power. He referred them to Abraham who exercised great faith even in trials.

'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son' Hebrews 11.17.

In Heaven there will be no more death, and therefore no further need for reproduction. The union will be spiritual, and while we may recognise one another and enjoy Christ's presence together, the union will not be one of a marriage, but rather eternal friendship and union

More Questions

in Christ. It is often said that a blessed marriage on Earth means the husband and wife are the best of friends. When that union has the added spiritual dimension it is truly deepened. It is that union, rather than the physical, that will be perfectly enjoyed in Heaven.

Conclusion

What is necessary for spiritual life to be the first fruit of resurrection life? The Word of God and the power of God.

‘...being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever’ 1 Peter 1.23.

He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living.

What is necessary for the resurrection of the dead? The Word of God and the power of God.

‘God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth’ John 4.24.

He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living.

If we have experienced God’s spiritual resurrection power we will experience its ultimate fulfilment at the end of the world, when we will be granted glorified bodies resurrected from the dust of our earthly body.

The first question was about a time issue – God is the supreme God overall. The second question was about an eternal issue – God is the supreme God overall.

44. THE FIRST AND SECOND COMMANDMENTS

Mark 12.28-34

‘And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.’

In and among the elite group of religious teachers was a man described here as a scribe. A scribe was one who devoted himself to the study and teaching of the law of God. It would seem this scribe was a person whose attitude differed from the negative attitude of his colleagues, a scribe with an open mind not a prejudiced mind, because he had observed sincerely the manner in which Jesus answered questions. He observed His demeanour, His patience, and above all he noted His wisdom.

In the previous passage we noted a difference in the manner in

The Gospel of Mark

which the questions were hurled at Jesus, but it does seem here, looking at all the records, that the scribe asked in a different spirit, not to catch Him out. It was a sincere question, a good question, and it was actually a helpful question. It was a question which produced a profound answer from Jesus which affects and challenges us today. He asked the question which had challenged Jewish religious rulers for centuries: which was the most important commandment? Which was the first in order and priority?

The Rabbis taught that all the precepts of the law were of equal significance. Therefore there could be no question of greater or less. But the debate on this issue remained, and no man had been able to answer the question with any authority. Here Jesus, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, quotes from *Deuteronomy* 6.4-9. In so doing He establishes the principle given to the Children of Israel by Moses. Every morning as they stand up and every evening as they lay down the Jews quote this passage called the 'Shema'. Twice a day they remind themselves of the greatness of God, the only true and living God; God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, all Who are united equally and in essence as the one God.

Twice a day they reminded themselves that they must love the Lord their God with heart, soul and strength. But now this procedure was simply a tradition, simply words, simply a ritual. It had become meaningless. We can see the danger of relying upon ceremony for acceptance with God, and the danger of just saying the words without meaning, with the mind and heart disengaged.

Now Jesus quotes exactly those same words but with authority, with life and with power. Jesus confirms a vital and important truth. Love is the key to our relationship with God.

Love God

'And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt

The First and Second Commandments

love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment' Mark 12.29-30.

Jesus says this love must involve every part of our body and being. This is a call to wholehearted and complete devotion to God. The entire person is involved. The whole duty of man toward his Creator God can be summed up in one word – love.

Love for God is not just having good feelings about God; if it is true love it will involve obedience, for true love involves the will as well as the heart. My whole being must be directed towards Him and His glory. He must come first in my ambitions and motives. I am to love Him with all my soul, so that all my affections will be in tune with His will and set to serve Him. My mind and heart must be engaged in this love. My will and strength must work in harmony.

But the question is, how can we love God in such a way? By nature we know in truth we do not love God as we should. Yet Jesus says this is the greatest priority of our life. Everything takes second place to a right relationship with God. Jesus presents a truth which, if we are honest, we will acknowledge we cannot fulfil in our own strength.

Jesus does not make such a statement to discourage us but to bring us to complete dependence upon God. There are steps of faith we need to take to love God in such a way as God's law commands.

By faith we must first know that He loves us.

'We love him, because he first loved us' 1 John 4.19.

How do we know God loves us? Because He gave Himself wholeheartedly for sinners like us.

'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' John 3.16.

How does God reveal to us personally that He loves us? He first

The Gospel of Mark

shows us our need of a Saviour. He then draws us by His Holy Spirit under His sovereign grace to trust in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord.

'But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' Romans 5.8.

'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich' 2 Corinthians 8.9.

'In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another' 1 John 4.9-11.

We may be God fearers, we may believe in God as many millions claim to do, but here Jesus is talking about loving God with our whole being, our whole being devoted to God.

This consecration of love in our lives comes by faith in Jesus Christ crucified at Calvary. When we come to the cross we are assured that God loves us so much He died for us. The outcome of this faith will be wholehearted devotion to God. Never attempt to love God with your whole heart without going first to Calvary.

*Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
Which before the cross I spend,
Life and health, and peace possessing
From the sinner's dying Friend!*

William Walter Shirley, 1725-86

Love your neighbour

'And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy

The First and Second Commandments

neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these' Mark 12.31.

A loving relationship with God is a spiritual relationship between believers on Earth and God in Heaven. Such a relationship will result in a loving, horizontal relationship with our neighbours on Earth. Our love for God will evidence itself in love for others.

Now this love is a working love; it is not dependent on feeling love for our neighbour. This love for our neighbour means a caring for, a looking out for, a protective love. The good Samaritan did not know the wounded man personally, but he cared, and he helped. His was a costly love.

Jesus clearly links love for God with love for your neighbour. In other words Jesus is saying love for God will evidence itself in a caring love for others.

Love yourself

'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' Mark 12.31b.

We may think this a strange statement coming from the same lips as the One who said 'Deny yourself'.

'Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me' Mark 8.34.

Jesus never contradicts Himself. Remember the context of the words before. Jesus had spoken about losing our self to save our self, losing our life to save our life. What did Jesus mean here? Jesus meant dying to selfish ambition and the flesh, or living only for oneself. It means dying to selfishness and living by faith in Jesus Christ so in Him to secure our eternal wellbeing. In other words, take up your cross and follow Him and be saved eternally.

This is to truly love ourselves, by taking care of our most precious possession, our never-dying soul, by the committing of all our life by faith into the hand of the Saviour Jesus Christ. If we really and

The Gospel of Mark

properly love ourselves we will be concerned for our eternal future. Where am I going to go when I die? Where will I spend eternity? No one else can take your place – this is your personal issue!

In our right minds we do care for ourselves, we are rightly concerned for our welfare. Nowhere do we read in the Scriptures that personal abuse of ourselves is condoned. If we love God we will respect the fact that we have been made in His image, even if we have imperfect bodies that have been marred because of the curse of sin in this world. We are nevertheless God's creation and there remains a reflection of God's image. In our right minds we do care for ourselves!

'For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church' Ephesians 5.29.

This same care for our personal wellbeing should reflect itself in care for others. If we love God as our Maker and our Saviour we will respect and care for humanity.

'Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God' James 3.9.

'And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness' Colossians 3.14.

The scribe clearly grasped what Jesus was teaching. He clearly saw that anything else we may do in or life is subservient and even pointless without love (see *1 Corinthians 13*). Jesus said he was not far from the Kingdom. We must trust in Jesus Who is the fulfilment of the law. How near are you to the Kingdom? Are you in the Kingdom?

'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death' 1 John 3.14.

Conclusion

'And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple,

The First and Second Commandments

How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly' Mark 12.35-37.

Jesus had answered a number of questions and now, as He taught in the Temple, He asks one Himself. The question relates to who David believed the Messiah to be. Why did David call Him Lord if He was his son? To call Jesus 'the Son of David' is quite true; relating to His humanity He was of the lineage of David.

'Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh' Romans 1.3.

The point Jesus is making is that David believed by faith not only in the future humanity of Jesus but also in the deity as the eternal Son of God, the Messiah in Heaven. It was His humanity and His deity that the religious leaders failed to accept, yet the common people heard Him gladly. Jesus was teaching in a way they could understand, with authority, and with purpose.

The statement, *'the common people heard him gladly'*, is followed by the condemnation of Jesus of the proud. There is only one way to properly receive the Word of God – that is with a humble heart. We must realise we are not more important than anyone else.

'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones' Isaiah 57.15.

'For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him

The Gospel of Mark

that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word'
Isaiah 66.2.

We are all born in sin and shapen in iniquity; we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. Are we willing to be among the common people? Are we expecting to be treated as someone special and important? Let us be among those who hear the message of Jesus the Son of God gladly.

45. ALL THAT I HAVE

Mark 12.35-44

Jesus observed how the scribes as religious leaders walked around full of their own importance like proud peacocks. They dressed to feel important and to be noticed – ‘Look at us!’ They expected and loved to be greeted as important people, to be recognised. They loved to have the best seat in the synagogue and to sit with the rulers on the platform. They loved the best places at the feasts, to be recognised with honour. Yet the same people like vultures descended into the homes of the bereaved widows. They offered their services as executors of the deceased with the purpose to strip the assets for themselves. They offered long prayers, deceiving the widows into thinking they had contributed to their spiritual benefit. Because of their hypocrisy they would receive greater judgment. Dr John Gill says:

‘It appears that there are degrees of punishment in hell, and that hypocrites, and all such who oppress the poor, under the mask of godliness, supposing that to be gain, will be partakers of the greatest degree of it.’

Jesus saw how the people put money into the treasury

‘And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury’ Mark 12.41a.

Jesus had previously taught:

‘But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth’ Matthew 6.3.

It would seem from this description the rich people gave in a very public manner.

Jesus saw how much the rich people put into the treasury

‘And many that were rich cast in much’ Mark 12.41b.

The Gospel of Mark

It would appear that the rich people were giving generously. They wanted people to notice how much they put in the treasury, how generous they were.

Jesus saw a widow throw in just two mites

‘And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing’ Mark 12.42.

Jesus showed both His deity and humanity here. As God He knew that this widow had put in all that she had. As a Man He watched her with His own eyes drop her two mites in the treasury.

Jesus had just condemned the scribes for devouring widows’ houses. He had condemned them for depriving the widows of assets, leaving them poor and vulnerable. Now here was one of these widows, poor and uncared for, wondering where her next meal was coming from; a broken-hearted widow who was on her own and vulnerable, and was facing an uncertain future providentially.

This widow has important lessons to teach us.

- She was not bitter, even though the scribes had probably taken her assets, even though providence had dealt her a hard blow in the loss of her husband. Here is precious example of living faith rising above the circumstances.
- She gave despite her poverty. Whereas it seems the rich put their money in to be noticed, she came in her poverty and threw in a couple of coins. The word ‘mite’ in the Greek means ‘light’, ‘without weight’. The English word ‘leaf’ is related to the same word. In other words the coins were so light they hardly made a noise when dropped in. She perhaps felt ashamed and embarrassed at the small amount. The rich were able to give such large gifts which made a great noise as they were dropped into the treasury, but her gift was like two leaves falling to the ground, hardly making any noise, so unnoticed and insignificant.

- She gave all that she had to give. It did not matter what people thought; the crucial point was that God knew. In God's sight it is not quantity which is important; it is the willingness to hand over all that we are able to into His hands to use in whatever way He sees fit. We see the same with the boy with the five loaves and two small fishes.

'There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?' John 6.9.

- She gave in faith. She knew God would not fail her; she sacrificed everything. These coins represented all that she had to live on financially at that point in her life.
- Jesus saw her gift. All our giving is done in the sight of Jesus.

Jesus purposely called His disciples to Him to teach them these vital lessons about the widow woman. You may be being tempted to think you are not worth much to God, not worth much to the church. Satan will hold us back from following Jesus by telling us we will not be an asset to the church but a burden. The lesson here is not only to do with our financial giving but also our service for the Lord. It has to do with our willingness to submit all that we are and all that we have into His hands by faith. As far as the world was concerned this widow was virtually worthless, but in God's sight she was more precious than fine gold. Man looks on the outward appearance whereas God looks upon the heart.

46. ADVICE FROM CHRIST FOR LIVING IN THE END TIMES

Mark 13

The discourse recorded in this chapter is Jesus' response to the disciples' admiration for the beautiful Temple building. There were two lessons the disciples needed to learn about the Temple. One was that, for all its size and beauty, it was a temporary building. Secondly, if the Temple building fails to host the preaching of the Word of God it is but an empty shell.

The Temple was undoubtedly beautiful. It had been greatly extended and had been virtually rebuilt about the time of Christ's birth in the days of King Herod. The Jews were extremely proud of their Temple. It demonstrated their religious roots and gave them a sense of religious superiority over their enemies.

But here in Jerusalem the religious leaders were far from really obeying the truth, the Word of God. Within a few days they would be instrumental in killing the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Judgment came upon them and the magnificent Temple building because of this rejection.

When Jesus informed the disciples of the coming destruction of the Temple it seems they were initially stunned. Could it be possible that this great edifice would be rased to the ground? A little later four of His disciples – Peter, James, John, and Andrew – asked Him privately about this issue. Note also the record in *Matthew*.

'And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the mount

The Gospel of Mark

of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?’ Matthew 24.1-3.

The disciples assumed the destruction of Temple would herald the end of the world and Christ’s second coming. However Jesus clearly separates the two events and referred primarily in this chapter to His second coming. The first event would have already occurred.

‘And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ Mark 13.2.

‘Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done’ Mark 13.30.

The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple happened in AD70. The events surrounding it recorded by historians happened exactly as Jesus prophesied. But the second event prophesied, the second coming of Jesus, has still to come.

Here Jesus gives us some experiences that will be in evidence during the times leading up to this event, experiences that are particularly awesome in power and evidence just prior to His coming.

The events described by Jesus are happening in measure throughout all the period until His second coming. However as we get closer to the end of the world they will increase in magnitude. We know the Christian Church has already known devastating periods of tribulation and persecution. Also, as we look at the world’s history over the last two thousand years, there have been earthquakes, wars and rumours of wars, famines, persecutions, betrayal, and deceivers. There have already been false prophets, anti-Christ’s and deceiving signs and wonders. However, nearer the end of the world all these problems will increase in power. People will become bolder in their rebellion and rejection of God and in their persecution of the Church. The

Advice From Christ For Living in the End Times

children of God, called His elect, will be subject to great deception attacks from Satan.

However, in the midst of all this, there are certainties to remember. The Gospel will be preached throughout the whole world before the end of time. God's Word will endure unto the end and into the new Heavens and the new Earth.

'Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away' Mark 13.31.

Man will never be able to predict the actual date and the timing of the end of the world. All attempts to do this are false and futile.

'But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father' Mark 13.32.

The world taunts today, 'Where is the promise of His coming? Life goes on; God does not seem to care or be in control!' Yet the believer, by faith in God's Word, looks forward to that day when Jesus returns in glory. As the day approaches in the end times we are told in *Luke's Gospel* to look up.

'And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh' Luke 21.28.

But how do we look up, and what advice does Jesus give us about our attitude and actions in the end times? How do we look to the future, knowing it is going to get increasingly challenging and persecution increase?

- Let no man deceive you.

'And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you' Mark 13.5.

Be strong in the Word of God and discerning.

The Gospel of Mark

- Do not be troubled.

'And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet' Mark 13.7.

Remember God is on the throne.

- Take heed to yourselves.

'But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them' Mark 13.9.

Examine your own hearts, take care of your own soul.

- Preach the Gospel.

'And the gospel must first be published among all nations' Mark 13.10.

Remember the Great Commission to the end of time.

- Trust in the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

'But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost' Mark 13.11.

In the times of crisis God will never forsake His people but will help them.

- Endure to the end.

'And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved' Mark 13.13.

Press on looking unto Jesus.

- Do not believe false declarers of Christ.

'And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo,

Advice From Christ For Living in the End Times

he is there; believe him not: for false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect' Mark 13.21-22.

Do not be carried away with false rumours, but be steadfast in the Word.

- Take heed of God's Word.

'But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things' Mark 13.23.

Discern the times through the Word of God.

- Be assured.

'But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven' Mark 13.24-27.

As you trust in Jesus you will be part of His great and final ingathering. What a call and drawing that will be when we will joyfully run to Him!

- Be ready and observant.

'Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: so ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors' Mark 13.28-29.

Understanding the times. The word 'maranatha' is a Syriac expression that means, 'our Lord comes.' It was used as a greeting in the early Church. When believers gathered or parted, they did not say,

The Gospel of Mark

‘Hello’ or, ‘Goodbye’, but, ‘Maranatha!’ If we had the same upward look today, if God’s people had a deepening awareness of the imminent return of the Saviour, it would help to revolutionize the Church in our land.

‘Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless’ 2 Peter 3.14.

- Watch.

‘Take ye heed, watch’ Mark 13.33a.

‘Watch’ means to avoid spiritual lethargy and spiritual sleepiness at all costs. It means to always keep the reality of the returning Master at any time.

‘Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober’ 1 Thessalonians 5.6.

- Pray.

‘...and pray: for ye know not when the time is’ Mark 13.33b.

We are to keep the regular times of prayer and communion with God. We should specifically pray that our lives are not so taken up with its cares that the day take us unawares.

‘And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares’ Luke 21.34.

There is an important link we must make here. Where else did Jesus instruct to watch and pray? It was in Gethsemane as He prepared for Calvary in the context of His suffering. There at Gethsemane He was overwhelmed with the knowledge of the coming wrath and terror of the Lord. He was aware of what the cost of suffering would be before He was hung upon the cross.

Advice From Christ For Living in the End Times

Jesus Christ has now experienced the terror of God at Calvary. He has endured the punishment due for all those who trust in Him. He has died upon the cross, bearing the wrath of God which was rightly due to come upon us for our sin. Our hope of deliverance from the wrath of God at the end of the world is found in Christ and His finished work.

Security from terror is very much key in the world in which we live. We are rightly concerned about evil terrorists, who create and manufacture terror, with their evil use of violence and intimidation to achieve a goal. But in a pure and just sense there is a far greater terror.

‘Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty’ Isaiah 2.10.

‘In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth’ Isaiah 2.20-21.

‘For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart’ 2 Corinthians 5.10-12.

We may be fearful about the terror of man while at the same unconcerned and blasè about the just terror of God!

‘Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted

The Gospel of Mark

worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man' Luke 21.36.

- Work. Remember we are servants of the living God created in Christ Jesus for good works, striving to shine as lights in the world. These are the guidelines the Lord gives us in preparation for that great day when He will return in glory.

Conclusion

While on a South Pole expedition, British explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, left a few men on Elephant Island, promising that he would return. Later, when he tried to go back, huge icebergs blocked the way. But suddenly, as if by a miracle, an avenue opened in the ice and Shackleton was able to get through. His men, ready and waiting, quickly scrambled aboard. No sooner had the ship cleared the island than the ice crashed together behind them. Contemplating their narrow escape, the explorer said to his men, 'It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go!' They replied, 'We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded each other, 'The boss may come today.'

47. AN EXAMPLE OF TRUE CHRISTIAN LOVE

Mark 14.1-11

This chapter starts with information regarding the terrible attitude of the religious leaders towards Jesus. They thought to take Jesus by stealth and put Him to death. They thought they were setting the agenda, and yet all was overruled according to God's sovereignty. The death of Jesus Christ is the greatest example of the overruling sovereignty of God in this world.

'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain' Acts 2.23.

Even in the events leading up to the crucifixion, there was the overruling sovereignty of God. None of the religious leaders were expecting Jesus to be betrayed by one of His closest disciples. The manner of their taking Jesus through Judas was not expected by the religious leaders. They paid him thirty pieces of silver, and eventually Judas committed suicide as prophesied in Scripture.

The death of Jesus took place at the time of maximum publicity. People from all over the known world had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast.

'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' John 12.32.

His death was overruled as a statement of the love of God to the whole world.

We are now going to consider an event just prior to the death of Jesus. This event demonstrates the beauty of true Christian love for Jesus. It describes how this love was expressed, and its contrasting

The Gospel of Mark

effect by considering the same event recorded in *Matthew, Mark* and *John's Gospels*.

We know that Jesus was taking supper at the home of Simon the leper at Bethany. He was called Simon the leper because he had been previously healed of his leprosy.

This event took place in Bethany, a place where the Lord knew He would receive a warm welcome. Jesus was there together with His disciples and Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mary was known for her spiritual devotion to the Lord and willingness to sit at Jesus' feet and learn of Him. Martha was known for her God-given practical gift of hospitality. Lazarus was undoubtedly known as a special friend of Jesus, for Jesus wept at his death before raising him. So at this supper, held in Bethany, Martha leads in the hospitality. Lazarus is seated at the table with Jesus. Mary, motivated by her deep love and appreciation for Jesus, anoints Him with very expensive perfume oil. Here Mary was prepared to break the barriers of culture and tradition to show her heartfelt love, using the opportunity to express her wholehearted devotion to Jesus as her Saviour and Lord.

Love that was Christ-centred

'And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious' Mark 14.3a.

The most important Person in the room for Mary was the Lord Jesus Christ. The most important Person in all her life was the Lord Jesus Christ. Her love was focused upon Him and upon the sacrifice He was shortly to make. Here was an opportunity to show all present in that house that Christ meant everything to her. He was her only hope for salvation and eternal life in Glory in the hereafter. Here is the epicentre of true Christian faith – where ultimately for us Christ is all in all.

An Example of True Christian Love

Love that was sacrificial

‘...and she brake the box, and poured it on his head’ Mark 14.3b.

Her gift was very costly. Maybe it represented the family investment laid up for the future. This spikenard ointment is described in *Matthew* and *Mark’s Gospels* as being ‘very precious’. The ointment would have been transported all the way from the Himalayas. This was an extensive journey of over two thousand miles by camel, which undoubtedly added to the cost. There was a recent report showing the thousands of miles some of the food in our shopping trolley has travelled before it gets to the supermarket. Distance inevitably adds to the cost.

The ointment’s value of 300 pence or, in the original term, ‘denarii’, was equivalent to nearly a year’s salary. One penny was equivalent to the payment for one day’s labour for an unskilled employee at that time. Therefore this ointment, according to today’s UK values, was worth over £15,000.

The point here is that Mary sacrificially used the best for the Lord. She gave something of value, something precious for the Lord. It was an extravagant act in a positive sense, motivated by love on a special occasion. It was a special opportunity to do the best for the Lord. When motivated by true Christian love to our Lord, this love will always have a sacrificial element to it.

Love without reservation

‘There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat’ Matthew 26.7.

The weight of the ointment is described in *John’s Gospel* as being a pound to show the extent of her devotion and generosity (*John 12.3*). Mark describes how an alabaster box of ointment was broken and poured out liberally and fully. You know how carefully a lady will open some valuable perfume. She will use just part of the bottle, with

The Gospel of Mark

the intention of using more at a later date. The broken alabaster box symbolised this woman's total commitment to Him. Nothing was held back – she gave everything for Jesus!

Normally the bottle would have been carefully unsealed at its neck; the ointment would have dribbled out very sparingly. But in Mark's account Mary broke the bottle in such a manner that the ointment gushed out over Jesus. The perfume was poured over His head, neck, shoulders and feet.

In Matthew's account Jesus spoke of the woman having poured the ointment on His body. Surely this speaks of wholehearted devotion to the Lord. A pound of ointment had been used for this part of the anointing, which was a very large amount. She was pouring out of her heart towards Him in reverent love and adoration, without reservation.

In this event Mary pours out everything for her Lord and kneels at his feet in total submission and adoration.

Love accompanied with humility

'Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment' John 12.3.

In John's account Mary is also seen as showing her total commitment to her Lord by wiping His feet, not with a towel but with the hairs of her own head, such was her respect, appreciation, and love for Him. This aspect of the event demonstrated most assuredly her love with humility. Mary realised the amazing grace of Jesus Christ towards her as her Saviour and Lord. Her love was a humble, grateful love; it motivated her to go on her knees at the feet of her Lord. Christ-centred Christian love, motivated by our gratitude to Him as saved sinners, leads the way in humility.

An Example of True Christian Love

Love that was not hidden

Her demonstration of love was public. She showed her identification with Jesus to all the guests. This action was a purposeful and public demonstration of her love to Jesus Christ as her Saviour and Lord.

In a way baptism is like this. We show and state publicly our hope is in Christ. We love Him and desire to follow Him with God's help for the rest of our lives. We identify with Christ. Our love should not be hidden.

Love that was with knowledge

Christian love is not just an emotional feeling. It is not just saying to yourself, 'I love Jesus', relying only on what you are feeling. It is a sincere love with knowledge, a love based upon facts about the perfect Person and work of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. The more we know about Christ the more we love Christ. Love for Christ deepens with knowledge of Him.

'That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death' Philippians 3.10.

Mary is at the feet of Jesus pouring out her affection to Him. But this action of affection is based on her knowledge of Him and His work. How can we be so sure the love of Mary was with knowledge? She knew in her mind that Jesus was soon to suffer and die, and she was preparing His body for this.

Her knowledge had fruit, but her action was motivated by a love with knowledge. Mary was making a public profession of her faith in Jesus and a statement about His impending death. Her love was not superficial but sacrificial with knowledge and understanding. This is confirmed to us by the Lord Jesus.

'She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying' Mark 14.8.

The Gospel of Mark

True Christian love will always keep in mind the cost of the cross – it is knowledgeable love.

Love that had an effect upon everyone present

‘And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her’ Mark 14.4-5.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the oil descending upon them all, but the effect of this action and its fragrance brought forth two differing responses. Sacrificial love for Christ is like a searchlight which lights up a person’s true state of mind.

This action was too much for jealous Judas. For Judas this was not an act of worship but simply a waste of money, and he made his feelings known! Judas in an unspiritual state could not discern between worship and waste, between grace and waste, between love and waste. He therefore was very quick to criticise an act of wholehearted devotion to Jesus.

Because of the hardness of his heart, he was unable to discern the true nature of its meaning. The Creator of the universe had left His glory in Heaven to live in poverty. He was just days from giving His life as the Saviour of the world. Put in the context of truth this devotion was not ‘over the top’, nor is any wholehearted devotion to Christ.

However it was this action of extravagant love to Jesus that triggered an incredible outpouring of jealousy and hatred in the mind of Judas. His outburst, seemingly on behalf of the poor, demonstrated what was on the inside of his wicked heart. Judas was a master in covering up his true identity. Judas was really upset because of the loss of revenue to his own pocket as the treasurer for the disciples. Hidden hypocrisy in a disciple!

Judas was not alone in his criticism. Even the other disciples and

An Example of True Christian Love

guests joined with him in their misunderstanding of Mary's action at the time. The action of the other disciples is a warning about the care needed when listening to the counsel of others. We should always take care not to follow the lead of a person who, despite the outward veneer, is actually bitter and deceitful in spirit.

This criticism also shows us that when we go the 'extra mile' in showing our loyalty and love for our Lord, we can be accused of going 'over the top.' But remember, the important issue is not what man thinks about our action, but what God thinks!

Love that was approved by Jesus

'And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying' Mark 14.6-8.

Consider the critical eyes and voices aimed at Mary, and note the vulnerability of Christian love. But Jesus is always alongside those who follow Him. Jesus says, '*Let her alone; why trouble ye her?*' Jesus springs to the defence of Mary. Jesus is always on the side of those who show Christian love, whatever anyone else may say.

Mark records that the Lord Jesus said it was '*a good work on me*'. Here was a woman walking closely with Jesus and the effect was a good work. In effect Jesus said that what she did to Him as a good work was lovely and beautiful. 'Good' here means 'thoughtful' or 'generous'.

This was the testimony of the woman recorded here in *Mark's Gospel*: '*She hath done what she could.*' This is a beautiful testimony. She did what she could to show her love and loyalty. Remember how Jesus understood the widow's mite.

'And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into

The Gospel of Mark

the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: for all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had' Luke 21.1-4.

God looks at the heart. Faith shows itself in works. She did what she could to show her love and loyalty.

Love that was timely

'For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always' Mark 14.7.

We know that Jesus was the perfect example of supporting the poor. His teaching here reminds us of the constant duty, for as long as this world is in existence, to help the poor. But here we have one of the special occasions which required urgent and definite action. Jesus was shortly to give His life. Mary realised this and showed her definite devotion to Him.

From this event we can learn that, while giving to the poor is an ongoing requirement, there are times when the Spirit prompts through the Word of God to show our love to the Lord in a special manner. These are special occasions when our love for Christ shines through our actions. They are special opportunities given to us by God to show the depth of our love to Him.

Love that was motivated by the Gospel

'She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her' Mark 14.8-9.

In anointing Jesus for His burial, Mary showed she understood He was shortly to die. In addition she understood the significance of His

An Example of True Christian Love

death as His sacrifice on behalf of sinners. She understood that her Saviour was willingly giving His life, going to the cross motivated by love. She had no doubt learned this Gospel at the feet of Jesus. She responds in an action of devoted love and gratitude.

At the heart of the Gospel is love: God shows His love to sinners in Christ. Sinners saved by grace respond in love. Mary's response of love to the love of God in Christ is a testimony for us until the end of time, a love which is not forgotten! Mary's memorial is Christ-centred love showing her love for the Saviour.

Natural love can do kind, practical things which are a blessing to the body and mind. But in the end it is Christ-centred love expressed in word and action which makes the most lasting impact on body and soul.

May God help us to show this love in our lives, and give us constant and exceptional opportunities to do so.

48. THE LORD'S SUPPER

Mark 14.12-26

The last action taken by Jesus together with His disciples before His suffering and death was for Him to establish what Christians call 'The Lord's Supper', or 'The Communion'. This is the ultimate fulfilment and meaning of a Jewish celebration called 'The Passover'. The transition from Passover to Lord's Supper focused its meaning on the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Confirming this connection, we note the disciples asked Jesus where they should prepare the Passover meal. It is evident that the institution of the Lord's Supper is set in the context of the original Passover meal.

Just prior to this event Satan entered into the heart of Judas to betray his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. The fact that Satan could enter into the heart of Judas in such a manner showed he was an unsaved man. A saved man, though troubled by sin, has his heart guarded by the Lord Jesus Christ from possession by Satan. Sadly, despite all the evidence before him and having observed the wonderful works of Jesus, Judas remained unsaved. He never at any time looked by faith towards Jesus Christ for his personal salvation. The heart of Judas remained open to the indwelling of Satan and the slavery of sin. So it was that this wretched man, Judas, betrayed the Lord Jesus out of jealousy and for money. Later Judas, although bitterly regretting what he had done, never repented but in bitterness committed suicide.

The condemnation of Judas shows us the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Judas dipped his bread in the same bowl as Jesus and yet betrayed Him.

But returning to the Passover meal we notice the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in knowing all the arrangements. Everything in preparation for this Passover meal was done decently and in order, according to the will of God.

The Gospel of Mark

The disciples looked to the Lord Jesus for guidance as to where He required the Passover meal to be held. Jesus the Lord was able to tell them exactly who would meet them and what he would be carrying. They must follow this man and then say to him, *'The Master saith...'* Jesus provided the exact answer to their question.

Now we come to consider the Passover meal and I would like to describe it to you as it would have been then. This is the type of meal Jesus would have eaten that evening. It followed the pattern of the final meal of the Children of Israel when held captive in Egypt. This was the night of their deliverance from slavery to freedom. On this awesome night God intervened bringing judgment on the land of Egypt for their cruelty. The Children of Israel were instructed by God to remember this deliverance each year and to give thanks; so the Lord, in bringing the Passover to its fullest meaning, tells believers to *'this do in remembrance of me'*. It is primarily meant to be a time of remembering what the Lord has done for needy sinners.

Contents of the Passover meal

Lamb: which reminded them how the blood of the lamb was the sign of security and protection. This blood, as instructed by God, they had pasted on the front door posts of their houses. When the Lord, Who destroyed the firstborn of the land of Egypt in judgment, saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of an Israeli home, He passed over that home. The blood was the sign of their salvation from judgment. They were secure only under the blood. So now believers who trust in the shed blood of Jesus as their Saviour are secure from God's judgment.

Unleavened bread: this was bread that had been baked without leaven, unfermented dough. It was bread that could be baked in a hurry and ended up more like a biscuit. This reminded them of how they left Egypt in a hurry. Leaven was also considered a symbol of corruption because of its fermentation process. Separation from

The Lord's Supper

leaven by eating unleavened bread symbolised separation from Egypt and slavery.

A bowl of salt water: reminded them of the tears they shed in Egypt and how they miraculously crossed the Red Sea.

A collection of bitter herbs: reminded them of the bitterness of slavery.

A paste made up of apples, dates, pomegranates and nuts: reminded them of the clay they used to make bricks under slavery. Sticks of cinnamon reminded them of the straw with which the bricks were made.

Four cups of wine: stood for four promises made by God to the Children of Israel.

'Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the Lord' Exodus 6.6-8.

The Passover celebration was an annual occasion and was one of the highlights of the Jewish year. Why spend time on pointing out the original symbolism of the Passover? For hundreds of years there was a remembrance through this ordinance. Now, in the same way, the bread and the wine symbolise the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Preparation

It is evident that great respect was shown for this feast. Careful

The Gospel of Mark

preparation was undertaken to observe it correctly. On the first day of unleavened bread it was the householder's responsibility to search the property to ensure no leaven remained. There was nothing haphazard or casual about the approach to this celebration, rather respect harmonising with joy and thanksgiving.

Procedure

Conducted by the head of the house – in this case Jesus – all the recipients drank a sip from the first cup of wine. The food – unleavened bread, herbs, fruit, nuts, and roast lamb – was then brought in. With the food on the table the youngest person would then ask, 'What do these mean?' They would recount the story of the Exodus, its history and the importance of remembering. After this they would sing songs of praise from *Psalms 113-115*. Then the second cup of wine would be passed round.

Just before the meal was eaten the plate of unleavened bread was lifted up, with the words, 'This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let everyone who hungers come and eat, let everyone who is needy come and eat the Passover meal.' The leader would give thanks for the bread and break off a piece for each one present. It is at this point of the breaking of bread that Jesus introduced the symbolism of His death in His body to be given freely and willingly under affliction, as the perfect sacrifice for sin. 'I am the Passover bread – I am the real meaning of it.'

The meal was then eaten and then the third cup of wine was introduced. The leader gave thanks to God for the wine and passed it round. Here at this point Jesus introduced the wine as the symbol of His blood, meaning the symbol of His death. This cup was the symbol of the New Covenant ratified by His blood. This means that, as the lamb had been slain for the Passover supper, so Jesus was to be slain and His blood shed. This symbolises the Covenant of Grace through Christ's death on behalf of sinners like you and me.

The Lord's Supper

There then followed the singing of *Psalms 116-118*. This brought them to the drinking from the fourth cup of wine representing the fourth promise: 'I will bring you into the land of promise.' However, Jesus did not partake of the fourth cup saying He would not drink any more until the fulfilment of God's Kingdom.

'Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God'
Mark 14.25.

In the new Heavens and the new Earth God will be eternally present among His people. The fourth cup represented the fullness of salvation, the fulfilment of the final promise of the Lord.

At the conclusion of the supper they sang a hymn together before leaving. So it is we sing a hymn at Communion.

'And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives' *Mark 14.26.*

Purpose

In this last Passover celebration before His death we see how the Lord showed its ultimate meaning in Him.

- It was Christ-centred – the Lord's Supper is centred on Christ (v12).
- It was Christ-led – the Lord's Supper is ordained by Christ (v14).
- It was Christ-united – the Lord's Supper is to fellowship with Christ (v15).
- It was Christ-fulfilled – the Lord's Supper reminds us how all Christ came to do was fulfilled (v16).

Christ developed the Passover Feast to its full meaning, its fullest significance. The deliverance of the Children of Israel from slavery and idolatry in Egypt was a picture of the deliverance possible for us in Christ by His death.

'For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us'
1 Corinthians 5.7.

The Gospel of Mark

Conclusion

The Lord's Supper symbolised:

- Deliverance through death;
- Sacrifice – the death of the Lord Jesus Christ;
- Reconciliation – the atonement made by the Lord Jesus Christ;
- Remission – forgiveness and release from guilt through God's grace;
- Thanksgiving – Jesus blessed and gave thanks;
- Grace – 'This is my body broken for you,' 'This is my blood shed for you.'
- Assurance – the new covenant replacing the Old Testament sacrifices with the one and only sacrifice;
- Protection – under the blood;

*Rock of ages cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

Augustus M Toplady, 1740-78

- Anticipation – till He come. This same Jesus will come again.

49. FALSE CONFIDENCE IN THE FACE OF FAITHFULNESS

Mark 14.27-31

‘And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all’ Mark 14.27-31.

The offence of Christ

Before the Lord entered the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives for prayer before Calvary, He spoke of the offence of Christ. He referred to how the disciples would flee when He was taken, offended at His apparent weakness. He allowed Himself to be taken; He allowed Himself to be smitten that the Scripture be fulfilled. So it was when they laid hands upon Christ and took Him away, His disciples scattered.

The risen promise

Notice here the amazing grace and faithfulness of Jesus. Knowing their desertion He promised to return. Here He is telling them of His resurrection. Despite their failures He would not give up on them. *‘I will go before you into Galilee’*. This is amazing grace, for in between Gethsemane and Galilee was Calvary! So the Lord has gone before us into Heaven to receive us unto Himself.

The warning

Peter here is full of self-confidence before the Lord to the point of

The Gospel of Mark

contradicting Him and denying His words. Again we see the amazing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren' Luke 22.31-32.

Note here the proactive intercession of the Lord Jesus. Peter's backsliding was not a surprise, but prepared for in God's sovereign protection. If we consider *1 Peter 5* we can see how grace worked in Peter's life to wean him from self-confidence to a testimony of dependence.

'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you' 1 Peter 5.6-7.

In all the failures of Peter and the disciples, the Lord loved them and restored them and cared for them. He does not change and He remains the same today towards all his people, praying for them, and going before them.

50. WHY GETHSEMANE?

Mark 14.32-42

To answer the question, ‘Why Gethsemane?’, we have to state and affirm first – it was the will of God the Father. He ordained, in His sovereign will, that His Son should be prepared for Calvary in this manner. The ‘why?’ of Gethsemane is wrapped up in God’s sovereign, permissive will and purpose of grace to His people. Gethsemane encompasses God’s will, wisdom, love, wrath, justice, purposes, Church, and salvation.

Gethsemane shows and proves that our Lord went to Calvary knowing all things that He was to suffer, for at Gethsemane the full realisation of what the salvation of God would mean was made known to Christ. At Gethsemane the love of Christ to sinners was proved beyond all doubt. He went to Calvary knowing the burden of persecution, the curse, suffering, abandonment, and wrath of God.

*On such love, my soul, still ponder,
Love so great, so rich, so free;
Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such love to me?*

John Kent, 1766-1843

Gethsemane was the place where God’s will was shown to transcend all other considerations. It is vital in our appreciation of the work of salvation in Christ Jesus that we do not forget Gethsemane. In Christ’s experience there we see, in its deepest sense, the evidence of prayer, trial, understanding, revelation, submission, and obedience. All these were a testimony for the disciples to observe by watching and praying. So we also come to consider Gethsemane, and in so doing see a Saviour worthy of all our praise.

The Gospel of Mark

Prayer

'And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray' Mark 14.32.

Gethsemane shows us the importance and significance of prayer. In His lowest point here on Earth the Lord resorted to prayer. The Lord showed that:

- however low, oppressed, burdened, or tried we may be, there is always a place for prayer; the everlasting arms of the Father are always underneath (*Deuteronomy 33.27*);
- when we must encounter suffering to do so on the foundation of prayer; prayer is an expression to the Father of our deepest concerns;
- prayer does not change God's will but it helps us conform to God's will;
- in suffering intimate prayer is made to our heavenly Father (v36);
- even at our lowest prayer must always record God's greatness (v36);
- in our deepest valley repetitive prayer is legitimate (v39);
- prayer is our most effective resistance to temptation (v38);
- prayer is an exercise wherein the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (v38);
- in our deepest valley in prayer God the Father sends help.

'And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him' Luke 22.43.

Understanding

One of the deepest truths coming from Gethsemane is the revelation of suffering given to the Lord. It was not the physical suffering – Christ knew He would endure that – but the spiritual suffering revealed to Him, for here at Gethsemane the perfect knowledge of the weight of God's wrath He would endure was shown. It caused Him

Why Gethsemane?

to be amazed, to be exceeding sorrowful unto death, to fall on the ground, to be in agony, to sweat great drops of blood. It caused Him as a perfect Man to be most deeply concerned about the cup. Christ went on to Calvary knowing what this cup contained and what this cup of suffering meant.

'Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth' John 18.4.

Nothing took Him by surprise. Justice was not hidden from Him – He knew what He was going to endure. The Lord Jesus Christ, knowing all that lay before Him, said, *'Rise up, let us go'* (v42).

Temptation

In the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke we find the Lord warning the disciples of the danger of temptation, that watching and praying were the most effective ways to resist the temptation of the enemy of souls. He showed them that without prayer the weakness of the flesh would prevail. Satan would have them all deny Him and His deity, to deny He was the Saviour and to desert Him.

It may be also, although it is not specifically stated, that at Gethsemane Satan made his final assault. As in the Garden of Eden at the Fall Satan tempted Eve and Adam to disobey God, Satan would still have Jesus crucified and out of the way but not as Saviour of the world. Satan would have Christ disobey the Father and hand the burden of the salvation of sinners back to God. Satan would have Jesus die on the cross at Calvary just a good man suffering injustice at the hands of man!

We see the evidence of this desire of Satan in the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost.

'Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain' Acts 2.23.

The Gospel of Mark

Satan thought he could control the situation, making Jesus die on the cross separate from the will of God. But the issue for the Lord at His deepest time of testing, under the knowledge of suffering and temptation, was the will of the God the Father; nothing was more important to Him than doing the will of the Father.

Obedience

When Jesus prayed this prayer He did so as a perfect Man, nevertheless showing His humanity. As a perfect Man He trembled at the reality of enduring the wrath of God the Father; He trembled at the reality of being cut off at Calvary from the presence of the Father; He trembled at the reality of the burden and responsibility of being the Sin-bearer; He trembled at the reality of being made a curse.

'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me' Matthew 26.39.

'Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me' Mark 14.36.

'Remove this cup from me' Luke 22.42.

His refuge in fear and trembling and sorrow and amazement was the perfect will of the Father. Here is the greatest ever prayer of faith that was made under the greatest ever burden.

'Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done' Matthew 26.42.

'Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt' Mark 14.36.

'Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done' Luke 22.42.

His obedience was evidenced to the disciples before their eyes. The Son of Man, the Son of God, submitted His whole being to the will of God the Father in prayer. Matthew tells us He went a little further and fell on His face and prayed; Mark says He went forward a little and fell on the ground and prayed; Luke records that He kneeled down and prayed. The disciples were left in no doubt that obedience to His

Why Gethsemane?

Father's will was of paramount importance to Christ. His obedience was also evidenced to the disciples when John says, as we have noted before:

'Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth' John 18.4.

Conclusion

a. Prayer

Here the Lord is brought to a point in His personal experience where nothing mattered but prayer. Here we have the perfect Man bowing before the almighty God, His loving heavenly Father.

Gethsemane teaches us there is no way so deep or so dark that we cannot send up soul-felt prayers unto God. We may point to the example of Paul and Silas who were beaten, bruised, bleeding, and thrust into the inner dungeon in the darkness, but praying and praising God. The point for us is that when all things seem against us there is always prayer. Jesus in Gethsemane set this perfect example that in the deepest valley there is always prayer.

Jesus teaches us to watch and pray; to pray exactly how it is, holding nothing back, always in submission to God's will and to pray as a proactive guard against temptation.

b. Understanding

Although, mercifully, it is not revealed to us all the details of our future pathway to Glory, nevertheless God has revealed to us the nature of this pathway. He has revealed to us a pathway of tribulation, trial, sacrifice, a cross, suffering, rejection, and separation. What to do when we are called like Jesus to go a step further into our own Gethsemane experience? He went a little further – He went forward a little. When we think we have gone far enough, and God calls us to go a step further, go down on your knees and pray!

'Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done' Luke 22.42.

The Gospel of Mark

Gethsemane teaches us that a pathway of suffering does not mean we are out of God's will but in it. The reality of suffering and being in the will of God is taught throughout the New Testament.

'And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together' Romans 8.17.

'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him' 2 Timothy 2.12.

'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution' 2 Timothy 3.12.

'Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator' 1 Peter 4.19.

c. Temptation

At Gethsemane Jesus taught the danger of temptation. Satan will tempt us to disobey God and deny Jesus Christ as the Saviour. He would have us slumber and sleep rather than watch and pray. Gethsemane teaches us that prayer is the most effective weapon against temptation.

'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto' Ephesians 6.18.

d. Obedience

The greatest lesson coming from Gethsemane is that obedience to God the Father 'whatever' is vital. Obedience to God transcends the pain of the 'Why?' Even the Lord cried, *'Why hast thou forsaken me?'* (Mark 15.34). The 'Why?' in the pathway of obedience can be very painful, and Satan will tempt us to use it unadvisedly. He will tempt us to use the 'Why?' in an accusatory manner, and in a way questioning God's love, care, and wisdom. But Gethsemane and Calvary teach us the wisdom of obedience whatever the pain of the 'Why?'

Why Gethsemane?

In the end there is no other way right for us than God's way. Faith transcends the 'Why?' and obeys the Lord because it trusts in His wisdom, love, care, and promise.

Remember the outcome of Gethsemane and Calvary and our own sufferings for Christ's sake. Jesus Christ went to Calvary believing by faith as a Man in the resurrection and the joy set before Him: for the joy set before Him He endured the cross.

*'...looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God'
Hebrews 12.2.*

Why Gethsemane? Because it is the will of God the Father, Who is all-wise.

51. THE REJECTION OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS RESPONSE

Mark 14.43-52

Jesus had just been through an awesome experience in the Garden of Gethsemane. Now, in obedience to His heavenly Father, He is spiritually prepared to go forward to the cross. He went to Calvary as the perfect Sacrifice in perfect accordance with His Father's divine will.

As we consider the events recorded for our instruction, we can see two incredible contrasts. On the one hand we have fallen mankind at its worst, plotting, planning, and proceeding against Jesus; on the other hand we have the example of Jesus, the Son of Man, behaving and ministering in His perfection.

Rejection of Jesus Christ

'And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him. And they laid their hands on him, and took him' Mark 14.43-46.

Judas had left the Passover supper when his intended betrayal of Jesus had been revealed. He went to the chief priests, scribes, and elders, and there with them transacted the awful deed to betray Jesus. These men together decided how they would capture Jesus, and Judas received his betrayal money. In terms of human responsibility the death of Jesus was caused by the premeditated evil intent of Judas and the religious leaders. They, being wilfully driven by envy and hatred, plotted and arranged His capture and death.

The Gospel of Mark

There is a clear sign as to the spiritual state of these religious leaders at this time. It had been the special time of Passover and yet, instead of celebrating the Passover supper, they were sitting together plotting the capture of the Son of Man. The account in the *Gospel of John* confirms they had not yet partaken of the Passover meal; being concerned about defiling themselves, they did not enter the Praetorium as it was a Gentile pagan building. Such hypocrisy confirms the condemnation by Jesus when He told them that they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel (*Matthew 23.24*). The cleanliness they needed was in the inner heart not on the outside. Their hearts were filled with jealousy, hatred, envy, and bitterness. Jesus had described them previously as being like whited sepulchres (*Matthew 23.27*).

Betrayal of Jesus Christ

The next terrible indication of fallen humanity is demonstrated in the actions of Judas. Here was a man who had known Jesus as a friend. He had had personal dealings with Jesus; he had had the privilege of being specially instructed by Jesus. Yet Judas obviously had an incredible ability to hide his true feelings. He, as one of the disciples, had been entrusted with the finances. Inevitably the truth must come out. The hatred Judas had festering inside his heart against Jesus eventually manifested itself in all its ugliness.

The Word of God gives us a warning signal about such a person as Judas: he doubted the deity of Christ. Towards the end of His life Jesus was being called 'Lord' instead of just 'Master', or 'Rabbi' meaning 'teacher'. This indicated a growing respect especially among His disciples. But Judas could not bring himself to say 'Lord'; he referred to Him as 'Master' (*Matthew 26.22, 25*). When Judas came to capture Jesus he referred to Him as 'Rabbi' (see v45).

The issue of the deity of Christ remains the key identification in the professing Church of God of those who really believe and those who do not. The key question remains, as the hymn writer states:

The Rejection of Jesus Christ and His Response

*What think you of Christ? is the test,
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest,
Unless you think rightly of him.*

John Newton, 1725-1807

It matters not what we dress like, what position we hold; if we are in the business of casting doubts about the deity of Jesus Christ in our ministry or conversation we are in the same camp as Judas.

Hypocrisy

Judas told the enemies of Jesus that the person he would kiss was the person they should take hold of. Here he used a word indicating a formal greeting kiss. However, when he actually kissed Jesus he did so in a manner used for special friends. In the original it means he fervently embraced and kissed Jesus. The word for 'kissed' used in verse 45 is the same as that used in the parable of the prodigal son. It is also the same word as that used for the Ephesian elders saying goodbye to Paul.

The point is that the heart of Judas was so hard he could look Jesus in the eye, embrace Him, and kiss Him apparently with feeling and yet at the same time stab Him in the back. Here we are trawling the depths of his depraved human heart. It is bad enough to betray a friend while appearing loving and caring, but to do such a thing against the Son of God reveals the heart and depth of evil in the human heart. The account of Judas remains a stark warning to take great care about professing love for Christ while at the same time betraying Him in word and action.

Aggression

'And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear' Mark 14.47.

The Gospel of Mark

From the account given in *John's Gospel* we know that the person who attacked with the sword was Peter. In a misguided act of loyal aggression he launched forth in defence of Jesus. In a way we can admire Peter for his loyalty, but his outward aggression revealed a problem within his heart. Jesus is not interested in aggressive loyalty but submissive loyalty from a heart of love.

There are two particular lessons which I believe this event teaches us. One is taken from the rebuke of Jesus: aggression feeds aggression. It is recorded in *Matthew* that Jesus said to Peter, '*all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword*' (*Matthew 26.52*). Jesus was not speaking against justified war but against an aggressive attitude in Christian service. He was teaching Peter that submitting to the cup of suffering to fulfil Scripture was the greatest test of loyalty. It is for God to send judgment in His time.

Jesus said He could have prayed to the Father to send twelve legions of angels in a moment (*Matthew 26.53*). (This would equate to at least seventy thousand angelic beings.) But how could Scripture be fulfilled if this happened? Our natural instinct is to defend ourselves and our rights, whereas there are times when God calls us to drink the cup of suffering to fulfil His will with a greater and more glorious end in view.

Fear

'And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled. And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked. And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes' Mark 14.48-53.

The Rejection of Jesus Christ and His Response

We are given a vivid account of a young man scared to death and literally running naked from the scene. It is evident he was a follower of Jesus, and identified as such by the rabble who had come to capture Jesus. This event reminds us that in our own strength, like the disciples and this young man, we would all run away. In the end they all forsook Him and fled. It is thought that this man was, in fact, Mark looking back over the events and recording with shame his own fear. This account serves as a warning to us not to approach testing times in our own strength. Fear is something which can grip us like a vice.

In stark contrast to the evidences of fallen nature we have the response of the perfect Man, Jesus Christ. There are two particular characteristics which shine from His example here.

Serenity

Amidst all the confusion, the deceit, the noise, the aggression, and the fear, one Man remains serene. He is the perfect example of the blessed person. He was the focus of hate and yet remained serene throughout. He healed the man who had his ear cut off and declined the opportunity to step out of His Father's will. It is this grand objective which inspired our Lord.

Submission

His faith in His Father's will inspired the statement, *'but the scriptures must be fulfilled'* (verse 49). There are a number of 'buts' in the Bible which bring us to the realisation that God is in control. Here is one. The submission of Jesus is something wonderful to consider, especially as it was for others not Himself. Throughout the Gospel records we are given many evidences of the amazing and glorious character of Jesus: gentle, humble, patient, forbearing, serving, enduring, truthful, faithful, gracious, meek, and submissive.

'Behold the man!' John 19.5.

52. THE PERFECT MAN, CHRIST JESUS AND THE FALLEN MAN, SIMON PETER

Mark 14.53-72

The perfect Man, Christ Jesus, on a false trial

And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire. And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together.

And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands' Mark 14. 53-65.

The Gospel of Mark

Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin council. This council was made up of seventy men including the High Priest, chief priests, elders, and scribes. The High Priest at the time was a man called Caiaphas. He had a reputation, according to historians, of being ruthless in achieving his objectives. The fact of the matter is that this Sanhedrin council broke many of their own rules in this trial.

Their rules stated:

- No trial should be held at night;
- No trial should be held at any religious feast times;
- Credible witnesses are essential before conviction;
- All ecclesiastical trials were to be held in the council building which was in the Temple precincts;
- If the verdict of death was announced, one night must elapse to give the court time to show mercy;
- No council member, including the High Priest, should ask a leading question to condemn a man to death.

In the case of Jesus all these rules were broken, such was the determined evil intent of the council. Despite the false trial our Lord still gave a true testimony. This was the occasion Jesus took to reveal publicly before His enemies His true identity. When asked by the High Priest, *Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?* Jesus replied with one of the greatest 'I AM' statements ever heard on this Earth. In the *Gospel of Matthew* the High Priest is recorded as demanding Jesus reply on oath. Humanly speaking, the reply of Jesus condemned Him to death. Now the High Priest could accuse Jesus before the authorities that He claimed to be a deity.

They were ultimately depending upon a secular court to finally destroy Jesus. The issue of the deity of Christ brings into context the cry of the crowd: *'We have no king but Caesar'* (*John 19.15*), who himself claimed to be a deity.

The Perfect Man and the Fallen Man

Now this court was made up of deeply religious men. They made great show of the outward and yet within their hearts were hard as stone. They were violent in their behaviour in word and action to Jesus. Yet remember later, on the cross, Jesus cried, *'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do'* (Luke 23.34).

A person's true colours are rarely seen until they consider their position to be under threat. Here were men acting to defend their own misguided authority, position, and tradition. This was more important to them than their own souls.

Another issue is the responsibility of leadership. Here the leaders are acting according to their fallen human natures and not according to grace. They did not truly recognise Who Jesus was. Secondly, their ungodly leadership impacts upon the people they serve and lead. Very soon a multitude is following their lead. Eventually their actions result in the fall of Jerusalem in AD70. The Jews as a nation still bear the scars of the statement made, *'His blood be on us, and on our children'* (Matthew 27.25). The decisions we take often impact upon the present and future generations, and we do well to remember this.

The fallen man, Simon Peter

'And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaeen, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto

The Gospel of Mark

him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept' Mark 14.66-72.

Again, in stark contrast to the amazing testimony of Jesus in word and action, we are given the account of Peter and his denial of his Master, Jesus. It is important that we consider this event as a whole and refrain from jumping straight into Peter's denial.

Courage

At the first all the disciples fled, most back to a safe house. However Peter came back. He followed Jesus at what he thought was a safe distance. He then gained access into the courtyard of the house where Jesus was being tried. Now Peter was no doubt all mixed up inside. He had promised devoted loyalty to Jesus, but he did so trusting in his own strength. He was curious to find out what was happening to Jesus.

The courage of Peter, however commendable, was based upon a sandy foundation. When tested it was proved to be of Peter not of God. Peter's pride and self-protection took precedence when he knew he was in danger. He was facing not only the challenges of the servant, but of a relative of the person whose ear he had cut off.

Before we rush to condemn Peter in our own judgment, take a thought about the other disciples, apart from John, safely shut away in a secret location. Peter, in his man-centred courage, placed himself as a prime target for Satan, so when attacked he put his trust in himself not in God. He reverted straight to the lies of the old nature not the truth of the new. But here his self-confidence was blown apart.

When we hear of Christians falling when left to themselves, let us also remember the reason they were attacked by Satan in the first place. How would we be in the same predicament? Peter's courage was commendable in that he followed Jesus, but his courage was misplaced in that he was trusting in himself.

The Perfect Man and the Fallen Man

Cowardice

Peter is challenged three times over a period of time. On three occasions he denies his friendship with Jesus, but on the third time with oaths and curses. This was the lowest point of Peter's spiritual life. He was already a born-again believer, but here he was acting in his own strength and wisdom. The tragedy for Peter was that he had failed to heed the warning of Jesus to him personally. Jesus had told him that Satan desired to have him to sift him like wheat (*Luke 22.31*). He loved Jesus, but when this love was put to the ultimate test he loved himself too much to remain indifferent to the consequences of faithfulness.

Self-confidence was Peter's Achilles heel, yet this experience which shattered Peter's pride was used by God to teach him a life-changing lesson. How did God go about sanctifying Peter's failure for his good?

Firstly, He reminded Peter of the Word of God that had come directly to him from Jesus. Peter came under the conviction of the Word. When he thought about the Word of God spoken to him, he wept because of his denial of the One he loved.

Secondly, He ensured that Peter looked to Jesus. The Word of God tells us that Jesus looked at Peter (*Luke 22.61*). As Peter looked across the courtyard to his Master their eyes met. There was a life-changing power in that look from Jesus. That look was part of the breaking down of Peter's pride and self-confidence. There was something about the look of Jesus which broke Peter's heart. He did not see a look of condemnation but a look of tender sorrow.

Thirdly, He ensured that Peter's tears were not selfish but self-effacing. Peter's tears of repentance were because of his failure, because he had failed his Lord. He had grieved his Master, he had brought dishonour upon His name.

Compassion

In Peter's denial we are given a clear example and encouragement to come to God, assured that He is always ready to receive the repenting

The Gospel of Mark

sinner. The difference between Judas and Peter was repentance and living faith. Judas, in his remorse and self-pity, despaired and despised God's grace and mercy and hung himself.

'For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death'
2 Corinthians 7.10.

Peter, in his self-despair, came to the God of mercy and grace and was restored. True faith requires humility and dependence and Peter learnt this lesson well.

Notice then the wonderful compassion of God to Peter in his restoration. There was the assurance that Jesus prayed for Peter's restoration and future ministry:

'...but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren' Luke 22.32.

There was the compassionate look of Jesus that would have remained indelibly fixed upon Peter's memory. There was a special touch of the grace and mercy speaking through the young man at the tomb.

*'But go your way, tell his disciples **and Peter** that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you'* Mark 16.7.

Then there were the loving and tender words of Jesus spoken to Peter at the time of his restoration assuring him of His love and nurturing Peter's love for Jesus (*John 21.15-19*).

Conclusion

Peter faithfully confessed his failure to others enabling the event to be recorded in such detail. One can imagine Peter going back to the other disciples in his distress and recalling the events. However, Peter does so to magnify the glorious grace of God. It was Peter who wrote of the God of all grace (*1 Peter 5.10*). He was emptied that he might be filled; he was broken that he might be renewed in God's strength. Jesus never stopped loving Peter even when he denied Him

The Perfect Man and the Fallen Man

with oaths and curses, but Peter could never feel the comfort of that love until he returned to the perfect God-Man, Christ Jesus.

‘...but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren’ Luke 22.32.

Despite the stark contrast between the perfect Man and the fallen man, the divide was not an unbridgeable gap. The bridge of God’s grace in Jesus Christ restored the fallen man, Peter. The God of all grace remains today.

53. ENVY AND PRIDE CRUCIFYING CHRIST

Mark 15.1-20

As we continue through the account provided in *Mark* we will consider the danger and depravity of two particular evils. I realise there are similarities between this and the previous chapter. However, it is important we follow the pattern of Scripture and place emphasis where Scripture places it.

The involvement of man leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus warns us of the outcome of two specific evils – envy and pride. The effect of these two evils working in our lives today unrepented of, is as if we crucify Christ afresh.

Envy at its worst

‘But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?’ Mark 15.9.

Why was it the Jewish leaders were so envious of Jesus? I would suggest to you that one of the reasons was the effect and influence Jesus had in His teaching. One of the main differences between the teaching of Jesus and that of the rulers was that He lived it out. He was truth alive; people listened to Him. When Jesus preached the people felt He really did understand. He sat where they sat.

‘The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him’ John 12.19.

- Envy is a uniting force for evil.

‘And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council,

The Gospel of Mark

and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate' Mark 15.1.

Judas and the religious leaders came together (*Luke 22.4-6*). We should beware the motive of our fellowship.

- Envy is a persecuting force – it led them to bind Jesus.

'When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: and when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor' Matthew 27.1-2.

In his opposition to the Gospel Satan attempts to bind us. Later we read in *Acts 13* when Paul was preaching the Gospel to multitudes:

'But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming' Acts 13.45.

But there is great liberty in faithfulness. See the example of the three faithful men in *Daniel 3*.

'And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire' Daniel 3.23-25.

- Envy is a misdirecting force – they led Jesus away. Envy motivates sinful actions.
- Envy is a dishonest accuser. *'And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing' Mark 15.3.*

'And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar,

Envy and Pride Crucifying Christ

saying that he himself is Christ a King...And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him' Luke 23.2, 10.

Secular means were used. Paul warns Timothy of such people.

'He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings...' 1 Timothy 6.4.

- Envy stirs up anger. *'And they were the more fierce, saying...'* Luke 23.5. It is like the stick that stirs up the mud in the bottom of a puddle, clouding the water.
- Envy stirs up dissent. *'But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them'* Mark 15.11.

'For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work' James 3.16.

- Envy supports the wrong cause. *'And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas'* Matthew 27.16.
- Envy stimulates negative emotions. *'And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed'* Luke 23.23.

'A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones' Proverbs 14.30.

- Envy hardens the conscience. *'Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children'* Matthew 27.25.
- Envy is an evidence of anti-Christ. *'The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God'* John 19.7.

Pride at its worst

On the positive side, Pilate recognised the innocence of Jesus and he did make some attempt to release Him. He no doubt understood

The Gospel of Mark

his duty to uphold justice but in the end justice for Pilate only extended to the preservation of his own position. He acted upon the wisdom he had at the time. He was but one person caught in an axis of evil which was ultimately subject to the overruling will of God.

However, Pilate was a person who always wanted to come out on top. If we follow the events, we can see how Pilate wanted to please both Jesus and the crowd. He was a vivid example of the person who wants to keep their options open and maintain the 'status quo'.

Pilate was a person driven by pride. In the end it was his pride which proved the overwhelming factor in his life. We see various characteristics of pride working in Pilate's life in his dealings with Jesus and the crowd:

- Pride and position. *'And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Mark 15.2.* This was Pilate's first question recorded in all four Gospels.
- Pride and opportunity. *'And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time' Luke 23.7.* Self-preservation was Pilate's motivating factor.
- Pride and compromise. *'I will therefore chastise him, and release him' Luke 23.16.*
- Pride and conscience. *'When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it' Matthew 27.24.* Pilate was a driven person!
- Pride and truth. *'Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?' John 18.38.*
- Pride and politics. *'And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar' John 19.12.*

Envy and Pride Crucifying Christ

- Pride and popularity. *'And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them'* Mark 15.15. Pilate wanted to gratify the crowd.
- Pride and cruelty. *'...and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified'* Mark 15.15. Scourging involved using a whip with lead and bone pieces. The Romans' cruelty knew no limit.

Conclusion

In contrast to envy and pride, Jesus conducted Himself through all the proceedings with serenity, in silence, with submission, showing His sovereignty.

'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth' Isaiah 53.7.

Let us *'Behold the man!'* (John 19.5) physically and spiritually.

54. THE POWER OF CHRIST'S OBEDIENT LOVE

Mark 15.21-32

In this faithful Gospel record we are given some of the amazing details of the ministry and suffering of Jesus Christ. In these verses we read about the crucifixion of Jesus. This was the greatest event this world has ever witnessed. Our salvation and peace with God and eternal future in Heaven depends upon a crucified Jesus. Without this event being ordained of God, the world would lie in darkness and hopeless despair. Because of Christ crucified there is hope; there is reconciliation with God; and we can be delivered from hell.

The significance of the death of Jesus upon the cross can never be over-emphasised. This, together with His incarnation, resurrection and ascension to Heaven, is the greatest event in the history of the world.

Paul, when writing to the Church at Corinth, looked back at his first ministry among them:

'For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified' 1 Corinthians 2.2.

The one and only sacrifice of Jesus suffering and dying on the cross at Calvary can be described using just two words: obedient love. Obedience to His Father in Heaven was His great objective; love for helpless, unworthy sinners was His great motive. These two characteristics of Jesus Christ remain the perfect example for the Christian to follow. As we proceed through these verses, we will see obedient love in all its fullness. The obedient love of Christ Jesus endured, whatever the attacks, opposition or persecution He faced.

The Gospel of Mark

The obedient love of Jesus in His weakness

'And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross' Mark 15.21.

It is evident that, because of the suffering inflicted upon Jesus, He was now in a very weakened condition. No longer able to bear the physical weight of the cross, they compelled Simon a Cyrenian to bear His cross. The depth of His physical suffering before He had come to the cross was evident for all to see, yet in His weakened condition Jesus allowed Himself to be led to Golgotha.

As the Son of God He could have called down a legion of angels to destroy His enemies, but He had not come to destroy but to save. In obedient love to sinners, despite His condition, He stepped forward. Now in His weakness Jesus ensured blessing. Simon was compelled to carry the cross.

I am sure at the time Simon was frustrated at this unexpected diversion. Now he was caught up in a humiliating spectacle. He was walking alongside a Person considered to be a criminal, carrying His cross. Simon was getting firsthand experience of what it was like to be close to a person being persecuted. As he walked throughout the crowded streets men and women, boys and girls hurled abuse at Jesus.

What possible good could God bring out of the weakness of Jesus which resulted in Simon carrying His cross? It would appear his experience led ultimately to his conversion. Mark reminds his readers that Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus. Why do this? Because at the time of writing Rufus was a well-known Christian believer in the Church.

'Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine'
Romans 16.13.

Christian believers must not forget the beginnings of God's grace in

The Power of Christ's Obedient Love

their family. Many of us who come from Christian families have been blessed through this experience. We must realise that if we go back in the history of our family it began with the conversion of one person. Through that conversion many have been blessed with a Christian upbringing and come to know the Lord.

This father carried the cross of Jesus and beheld close to him the Lamb of God. He beheld His demeanour, His suffering, His response. He thought, 'Surely this is a righteous Man!' Having come to Jerusalem to observe the Passover with his own purchased lamb for sacrifice, he carried the cross of the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the world, and he was blessed by that experience. The obedient love of Jesus brought forth fruit.

The obedient love of Jesus in His submission

'And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not' Mark 15.23.

Because of the problem of pain we regularly take pain-killers and find relief in so doing. Here was an opportunity for Jesus to get some relief from the agony and pain which racked His body. Obedient love for Jesus meant foregoing the option of pain relief that His suffering might be perfect.

Here we see the whole submission of Jesus to whatever God in His sovereign will allowed Him to pass through. Above all His mind must be perfectly clear to experience all that the Father was to lay upon Him. The obedient love of Jesus means He can perfectly and fully sympathise with all those suffering from pain. *'In all their affliction he was afflicted'* (Isaiah 63.9). He sympathises as the great High Priest, knowing the problem of pain, not only of the body and the mind, but the pain of the soul, the pain of the emotions, and of being forsaken.

Christ crucified is the most awesome example of human suffering without pain relief. Perfect obedience motivated by perfect love ensured that Jesus endured to the end what His Father ordained.

The Gospel of Mark

The obedient love of Jesus in His sacrifice

‘And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take’ Mark 15.24.

There are statements made in the Bible which are short and yet almighty in meaning. For example, *‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth’ (Genesis 1.1)*, or, *‘He made the stars also’ (Genesis 1.16)*.

The significance of this short statement, *‘And when they had crucified him’*, carries eternal weight. The truth of this statement speaks to us about a Person Who has lived in Heaven having to experience hell.

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ John 1.1.

‘And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was’ John 17.5.

A pale comparison is given by J G Ballard in his book *Empire of the Sun*. It documents the experience of incredibly wealthy British people living in Shanghai being captured by the Japanese and thrown into prisoner of war camps. This was an utter contrast to their previous lifestyle.

‘For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich’ 2 Corinthians 8.9.

The obedient love of Jesus preaching in His humiliation

‘And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left’ Mark 15.27.

The contempt of the world for Jesus was demonstrated in the way He was crucified with thieves. But in His humiliation He preached an awesome message, positioned as He was between the two thieves. The cross speaks to us about both mercy and judgment. Significantly,

The Power of Christ's Obedient Love

John describes the scene at Calvary as Jesus being in the midst, in the middle, at the centre (*John 19.18*).

Whenever a group photograph of world leaders is taken at a conference, great effort is taken to position everyone in the photo in a sensitive manner according to their current status as leaders in the world. The person in the middle is deemed the most important or significant.

Now on the stage of world history Jesus Christ has a central role – not in popularity because the majority reject Him – but in the role which He took on behalf of mankind.

The Fall

Adam and Eve, having been created by God, lived in perfect happiness in a place called the Garden of Eden. But, disastrously, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's one test of obedience. Instead they followed the lies of the arch-enemy of God, called Satan. As a consequence their relationship with God was broken and they became the slaves of Satan. Immediately there was an absolute and essential need for someone to defeat Satan, the one who had caused such a dreadful fall.

God promised after this fall, in His great mercy and love, that He would send Someone Who would defeat Satan, Someone to release those held captive under his evil power. This Person is Jesus Christ, God's Son. God said He would bruise Satan (*Genesis 3.15*), meaning He would defeat and overwhelm Satan and break his power. He would get the victory over Satan for all those who put their trust in Him. So from the beginning of history Christ had a central role and purpose. He was not an 'after event', or an 'add-on', but central to God's preordained plan for His creation.

In His life

When Jesus was here upon Earth He claimed to be the Son of God, expressing a truth about Himself. His claims had the effect of forcing

The Gospel of Mark

people to come down on one side or the other. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, both God and Man in one Person.

On the cross

This is powerfully displayed in His crucifixion as already mentioned. On the one side there was a thief who, in his agony, cursed and blasphemed against Jesus. On the other side was a thief who began that way, but then the light shone into his mind and heart. As he hung upon the cross in his own agony, he looked across at the suffering Saviour. Spiritual light dawned upon him: this Man has done nothing wrong and yet He is suffering. His heart went out in love toward Jesus and there he realised that his only hope was in Jesus. So he cried out *'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom'* (Luke 23.42).

So we can see this picture. Consider the unique role and position of Jesus at this time. Jesus in the midst, the Man in the middle: on one side a believer, on the other an unbeliever. To the one He was the willing Saviour Who said, *'To day shalt thou be with me in paradise'*. To the other Jesus Christ was the weeping Judge, Whose heart was grieved at the thief's unbelief.

In His death

Jesus stands as the one Mediator (the Peacemaker) between God and man. He has endured the wrath of God because of sin on behalf of all those who will put their trust in Him. When we repent of our sin and believe in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, His finished work on the cross becomes ours. The merit of His sufferings for our sin is put to our account. God the Father views us in Christ; this is His unique role and position.

'For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' 1 Timothy 2.5.

The obedient love of Jesus in enduring mocking

'And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads,

The Power of Christ's Obedient Love

and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe' Mark 15.29-32a.

They blasphemed Him. This has the meaning here of defiant irreverence. They said, 'Aha!' What does this little word mean? It means an exclamation in which glee, scorn and sense of victory is expressed. It is used here in the sense of the fulfilment of their hatred against Jesus. With hardened hearts they looked at Jesus suffering. They pointed the finger and delighted in what they considered to be His final humiliation.

Normally those being crucified would retaliate, and yet Jesus remained in silent suffering. In His silence His enemies hurled more abuse. The enemies of Jesus made a profound statement of truth without realising its significance. Jesus could not save Himself and save His people at the same time. His obedient love kept Him on the cross. So here we have the ultimate fulfilment of what God says in His Word, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee' Psalm 76.10.

The obedient love of Jesus when reviled

'And they that were crucified with him reviled him' Mark 15.32b.

The Apostle Peter exhorts believers who are suffering for doing what is right to take this suffering patiently. To undergird and support his teaching He uses the example of Jesus in suffering.

'For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened

The Gospel of Mark

not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously'
1 Peter 2.21-23.

The obedient love of Jesus in His death

'And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost' Mark
15.37.

Jesus cried, *'It is finished'*, and gave up His spirit unto death, voluntarily, in obedient love. Every step and statement Jesus made in His suffering and death speaks to us of obedience, sacrifice and love.

Before the three hours of darkness over all the Earth, when Jesus entered into the deepest part of His suffering, He spoke three times while hanging upon the cross. On each of these occasions He was speaking on behalf of others in compassionate intercession.

1. *'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23.34).*
2. *'Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 23.43).*
3. *'Woman, behold thy son!' 'Behold thy mother!' (John 19.26-27).*

He is telling us through God's Word how much He cares for sinners in His obedient love.

*On such love, my soul, still ponder,
Love so great, so rich, so free:
Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such love to me?
Hallelujah!
Grace shall reign eternally.*

John Kent, 1766-1843

How are we going to respond to such love? The words of this hymn give us encouragement:

The Power of Christ's Obedient Love

*Poor sinner, dejected with fear,
Unbosom thy mind to the Lamb;
No wrath on his brow he does wear,
Nor will he poor mourners condemn;
His arm of omnipotent grace
Is able and willing to save;
A sweet and a permanent peace
He'll freely and faithfully give.*

*Come just as thou art, with thy woe,
Fall down at the feet of the Lamb;
He will not, he cannot say, Go,
But surely will take out thy stain.
A fountain is opened for sin,
And thousands its virtues have proved;
He'll take thee, and plunge thee therein,
And wash thee from filth in his blood.*

*The soul that on Jesus relies,
He'll never, no never deceive;
He freely and faithfully gives
More blessings than we can conceive;
Yea, down to old age he will keep,
Nor will he forsake us at last;
He knows, and is known by, his sheep;
They're his, and he will hold them fast.*

William Gadsby, 1773-1844

55. WHEN GOD REMINDS US WHO IS IN CONTROL

Mark 15.33-41

The cross is the great demonstration of the power of God over the power of Satan. Satan moved sinful men to put Jesus on the cross, yet remained under God's sovereign, overruling power! The cross helps us to appreciate in our minds the awesome power of God over evil, the absolute power of God over Satan to bring blessing from tragedy.

Until this particular moment in time recorded for us here in the *Gospel of Mark*, every indication viewed from a human perspective would evidence that man was in control of events. Jesus had willingly submitted to the most awful hurt, persecution, and abuse, culminating in His crucifixion. Evil men had been allowed to vent their hatred and anger upon the perfect Son of God. Up until this moment proud men had strutted about thinking they were in control, thinking they were determining the outcome. Had they not humiliated Jesus? Had they not proved their point? How their pride and arrogance came to the fore, as they hurled abuse at Jesus as He hung the cross. Until this point they felt in control, they had gained satisfaction in this event. He had not come down from the cross to show His divinity, despite their challenges.

'Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe' Mark 15.32.

'Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment' Psalm 73.6.

Pride is like furniture which is not solid wood but veneer stuck onto chipboard. It looks good on the surface but eventually the covering gets chipped and reveals what is underneath. Ultimately at Calvary

The Gospel of Mark

God took away the veneer of man's pride and stamped His own authority on the event. This is the point at which God stamps His own authority on the proceedings, putting down the proud. At Calvary, in an awesome manner, God reminds us that He is God, the God of justice and love.

Now God the Father steps into the arena of Christ's sufferings upon the cross. God the Father awesomely demonstrates an overruling power over all events. He demonstrates His sovereignty, and proud man is a helpless onlooker unable to stop the unstoppable God working in whatever manner He determines. It is at this point that God introduces events which man cannot either explain away or imitate.

God over creation: the darkness over the whole Earth

'And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour' Mark 15.33.

The darkness that covered the whole land cannot be explained by saying it was an eclipse of the sun. It was the Passover season and the time of a full moon. It can only be attributed to the miraculous intervention of an almighty God. God has left the event unexplained to the human intellect, yet faith accepts the event as certain reality.

Imagine the consternation which must have enveloped the land; the fear for the children – darkness in the day time! What is happening? For three hours total darkness was over the whole land. Imagine being on a country lane on a cloudy night with no street lights or torch; the darkness is something tangible. Surrounded by darkness at night can be a terrifying experience. But here was such darkness in the daytime.

What was the great significance of the darkness?

It was the voice of God's judgment, a warning to the world. But at the same time, it was the symbol of God's wrath afflicting His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ. When God sent the darkness there is no

When God Reminds Us Who is in Control

record of any words being spoken by either by man or by the perfect Man, Christ Jesus, for a total of three hours. Eventually it was only Jesus Who could finally break the silence because He alone had the authority to know when God's judgment was satisfied.

The three hours of darkness symbolised, in an awesome manner beyond our comprehension, the awful problem of sin and hell. Hell is described in the Bible as the '*blackness of darkness for ever*' (Jude 1.13). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took upon Himself humanity and, as the perfect Man, the Son of God suffered the eternal punishment due to all those who believe in Him. For them He went into the blackness and darkness of hell under the justice and judgment of God.

*Behold a scene of matchless grace,
'Tis Jesus in the sinner's place;
Heaven's brightest Glory sunk in shame,
That rebels might adore His name.*

*Tremendous clouds of wrath and dread,
In vengeance burst upon His head;
Ten thousands horrors seize His soul,
And vengeful mountains on Him roll.*

*He sighed; he groaned; he sweat; he cried;
Through awful floods he passed and died;
All penal wrath to Zion due,
Infinite justice on Him threw.*

*He rose in triumph from the dead;
Justice declared the debt was paid;
Then Christ with kingly grandeur flew,
And took His throne in glory too.*

The Gospel of Mark

*Come, saints, with solemn pleasure trace
The boundless treasures of His grace;
He bore almighty wrath for you,
That you might all His glory view.*

William Gadsby, 1773-1844

What was significant about the timing of the darkness?

The timing of the crucifixion of Jesus is significant. It was at the time of the Passover. The Passover, as we have noted previously, was instituted by God to remember His amazing intervention when He delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt. On the night of their deliverance each family in each house was instructed to slay a lamb. They were to take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the lamb's blood that was in the bason. Then they had to strike the lintel and two side posts of their door with the blood of the lamb. Only those families that stayed within their houses showing the blood of the Passover lamb on the lintel and door posts were secure from the Destroyer.

'For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt' Exodus 12.12-13.

'Through faith [Moses] kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them' Hebrews 11.28.

God's last warning to Pharaoh, the evil king, before that terrible night when the Destroyer came was the plague of darkness. That plague of darkness symbolised God's judgment, and preceded the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Now those events hundreds of years

When God Reminds Us Who is in Control

before in Egypt find their ultimate meaning and fulfilment in Jesus. A plague of darkness preceded the death of Christ, the perfect Passover Lamb.

'For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us' 1 Corinthians 5.7.

At Calvary God reminds man that He is God, and He is in control and overruling all events.

God reminding us that His Son Jesus is both God and Man

'And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mark 15.34.

He was sacrificed upon the cross as the perfect Man, the Son of God, bearing the punishment for the sin of all those who believe and trust in Him.

'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' Isaiah 53.6.

'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him' 2 Corinthians 5.21.

'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God' 1 Peter 3.18.

At the same time as Jesus suffered and died as a Man, He never stopped being the Son of God. As He hung upon the cross bearing the eternal punishment He remained both God and Man, having both a divine nature as God and a perfect human nature as Man. There were times in His ministry, in His suffering, and here upon the cross, when Jesus clearly and unequivocally reminds us of both His divinity and humanity. For example, as the divine Son of God He could say to the

The Gospel of Mark

dying thief, 'Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise' (Luke 23.43). No other person but God has the authority to make such a promise! But then as the perfect Man in His humanity He could say, 'I thirst' (John 19.28).

It is the two loud cries of Jesus recorded in our passage which clearly demonstrate to us both His humanity and divinity.

'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'

Jesus cried with a loud voice. The depths of this cry remain a deep and unfathomable mystery to the greatest theologians. When Charles Spurgeon preached on this cry, he said:

'I think that our Saviour was speaking as a Man and that this is the reason that He cried "My God, My God." Jesus Christ was forsaken of God because we deserve to be forsaken of God. He was there on the cross in our room, place and stead. Jesus Christ standing in the place of the sinner had to come under such a cloud.'

It is in this understanding that we have the forsaken cry which emanates from the humanity of Jesus. It is essential that by faith we understand the effect that sin had upon our Saviour. As the perfect Man now bearing sin, as the just for unjust, He experienced in a very real way the pain of separation from the conscious presence of His Father. This demonstrates to us the very real humanity of Jesus. Sin separates. Sin can only be attributed to humanity, not to God. God is entirely separate from sin and will not allow sin into His presence. As Jesus, in His perfect humanity, became sin for us He experienced the very real pain and separation which sin causes. This terrible and totally unique and unusual experience for the perfect Man Jesus brought forth this cry.

There is something very deep and profound about this cry, 'My God, my God!' The faith of Jesus, firstly in His eternal union to God the Father, and secondly in the perfect will of God the Father to Him,

When God Reminds Us Who is in Control

shines so brightly on the cross in the darkness, despite the suffering, and despite the judgment. Here is the greatest demonstration of faith of all time. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, trusting in the will of God His Father in the worst experience of all time. Despite this awful experience He still cries by faith, *'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'*

It is said that Martin Luther, attempting to understand this event, put his head in his hands and sighed, 'God forsaking God! who would have thought of such a thing?'

Here we are reminded of the indescribably intense pain of separation felt by the Son of God on the cross. I read the testimony of a father whose little child was in hospital for a serious operation. The little boy was in Intensive Care. In his pain he cried out for his father, but his father was not allowed in the room. He could not be there at that time; he was not allowed near in case of infection. The father loved his little boy, and yet knew separation was essential for a time. For the little boy it seemed as if his father had forsaken him. He called out to his father but there was no answer! He knew the pain of feeling forsaken by the one you love and trust.

Jesus called out in faith, *'My God, my God'*, but the pain was felt deeply because the Father did not answer. Where was the Father? *'Why hast thou forsaken me?'* The Father could not be there because He had laid upon His Son the burden of sin for all His people. He was bearing the punishment for their sin. God the Father could not punish and comfort at the same time. Words cannot describe the comfort Jesus Christ received from the Father's presence later in Paradise, but neither can words describe the pain of the separation in that awesome time on the cross.

At Calvary God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ gave a profound message to this world – sin separates humanity from God and sin has dreadful consequences. Sin means judgment!

The Gospel of Mark

'It is finished'

'And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost' Mark 15.37.

There was something about the power, depth, and manner of this cry that demonstrated both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. As Man we read Jesus cried out with a loud voice: *'It is finished'* (John 19.30). However, this cry also demonstrates His authority as God. As God He was fully aware of having perfectly accomplished His mission so in His authority as both God and Man He committed His spirit into the hands of His Father.

At the same time the physical outcome of His cry demonstrated His deity in another way. We know from the accounts in the other *Gospels* there was a tremendous earthquake. The world was helpless to stop these irrefutable signs from God of the authority of His Son Jesus Christ. Oh the power of this cry, *'It is finished!'* The rocks were rent in two, graves were opened and people resurrected. This is a picture for us of conversion. The heart of rock is broken, spiritual life is given, all because of Christ!

At Calvary God reminds man that He is God, and He is in control and overruling all events.

God reminding us He is almighty: the veil of the Temple was torn in two

'And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom' Mark 15.38.

An access of mercy! The original, God-ordained Temple worship at Jerusalem involved the High Priest once a year entering the inner sanctuary known as the Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies. He entered in with the blood of the sacrifice on behalf of the congregation. It was a solemn experience and occasion as the congregation outside the Holy Place waited to see if the High Priest would reappear. His reappearance would be a sign that God had accepted the offering for

When God Reminds Us Who is in Control

sin. The congregation would rejoice, knowing that God had accepted the sin offering. The awful alternative would mean the sacrifice was rejected, the High Priest being consumed by the holiness of God.

This sacrifice and ceremony was a continual sign in Old Testament times foretelling the coming Saviour Who would be the one and only offering for sin. Now here, on the cross, the time has come. God demonstrated His miraculous sovereign power to give His message of love and hope to this world.

As Jesus cried, *'It is finished'*, the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom. Why from top to bottom? Because such an event proved it was of God and not of man. The curtain was too high for a person to tear from top to bottom. It signified that access to God had now been accomplished through the blood of Jesus. His sacrifice was accepted. Now, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross, access has been made.

'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh'
Hebrews 10.19-20.

If we come to God by faith in Jesus Christ there is a glorious access and welcome. Here is the ultimate purpose of salvation – reconciliation with God and access to God. Have you come just as you are with your sin to Christ? Have you gained access to the Holiest by the blood of Jesus? Through the blood of Jesus you can be forgiven, cleansed, and reconciled; through the blood of Jesus you can have a glorious access to God the Father; through the blood of Jesus you can have an entrance to Heaven.

At Calvary God reminds man that He is God and He is in control and overruling all events.

The Gospel of Mark

Conclusion: God in control at the cross

And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem' Mark 15.39-41.

These two particular miraculous events at Calvary, the darkness over the land and the tearing of the curtain, are God's demonstration of His divine, sovereign control and His justice and mercy. The suffering and death of Jesus Christ upon the cross was not an event determined by man but ordained and overruled by God. It was a time when God the Father reminded the world that He is God and in His love provides salvation. It was a time when God the Father reminded the world that His Son, Jesus Christ, was both God and Man.

At Calvary God reminds man that He is God and He is in control and overruling all events.

The responses varied:

- a. The enquiring centurion – confession (verse 39);
- b. The believing women – contemplation (verses 40-41);
- c. The congregation on the Day of Pentecost – conviction (See *Acts* 2.22-24,36-37).

The great missionary David Brainerd wrote in his journal these words:

'I find new Christians begin to put on the garments of holiness and their common life begins to be sanctified even in small matters when they are possessed with the doctrine of Christ and Him crucified.'

56. STANDING UP FOR JESUS

Mark 15.42-47

We will now consider the testimony of a man called Joseph from Arimathaea. Arimathaea was a small town approximately thirty miles from Jerusalem. The name of the town means ‘set up on high’. Joseph, a humble and yet rich and powerful man, came down from the city on high to serve his Master, Jesus, Who was lifted up on high and crucified on the cross at Calvary that He might draw all men unto Him. Together with his friend Nicodemus, motivated by love and faith in Jesus, Joseph identified himself as a true believer. The witness of these two men is left on record to confirm the outworking of God’s sovereign plan.

Joseph was a prominent council member

‘And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor...’ Mark 15.42-43a.

Joseph was a much respected religious leader. He was a distinguished member of the Jewish Supreme Sanhedrin Court, and not just a member of this important council, but a prominent member of it. Here he is described as honourable.

Undoubtedly a very wise and mature leader, Joseph was a man who really thought matters through seriously. In those days the Jewish leaders advised the people not only on spiritual matters but also on practical ones. Joseph, a prominent leader in society, was recognised as trustworthy, wise and effective.

Joseph’s position reminds us of how important it is to have God-fearing people in positions of authority in the land. Joseph reminds us that God has His people in prominent positions and we must pray for them. Of course, Daniel is one of the great examples where God in

The Gospel of Mark

His sovereignty raised up godly leaders. He was the Prime Minister of the world's greatest empire and economy at the time.

Waiting for the Kingdom of God

'...which also waited for the kingdom of God' Mark 15.43b.

Joseph was one of the few looking by faith for the Messiah. It was the death of Jesus upon the cross that finally convinced Joseph to publicly make his stand for Jesus. He truly saw Jesus as the King, not in a political sense but a spiritual sense. He believed in Jesus as his Saviour and Lord. He saw the coming of the Kingdom of God in the Person of Jesus Christ the Lord. He was one of the few not following the crowd. He saw Jesus as the One Who fulfilled the coming of the Kingdom of God.

'Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me' Matthew 11.4-6.

Now the attitude of Joseph in a sceptical world sets a powerful example for Christians today. We are called to live in the expectation of Christ's return.

'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven' Acts 1.11.

A secret disciple

Up until this time Joseph had kept his faith in Jesus to himself. He was what was known as a secret disciple of Jesus.

'And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus' John 19.38.

Standing Up For Jesus

In His sovereignty, God had placed one of His people in a prominent place in the religious leadership. Joseph could verify all the events which would later be questioned by unbelieving Jews. Very soon there would be those who questioned whether Jesus really died, but Joseph knew for sure.

There was a time when Joseph had to come out in the open with his faith. There was a time when Joseph could no longer be a secret disciple. He must be delivered from the fear of the Jews that entangled him. So it was that with God-given courage Joseph made a stand for Jesus in two particular ways.

1. He did not consent to the evil decision of the Council to crucify Jesus;

2. He went to Pilate, an enemy of the Jews, and pleaded for the body of Jesus.

Jesus calls us to make a stand for Him.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus

Ye soldiers of the cross!

Lift high His royal banner,

It must not suffer loss.

George Duffield, 1818-88

Joseph was a man prepared to stand up and be counted. Are you willing to make a stand like Joseph for Jesus? Standing up for Jesus requires courage, commitment, and faith. It is the high calling of a Christian.

He did not consent to the evil decision

Joseph had not compromised his faith by voting in favour of the death of Jesus. He refused to consent to the death of Jesus. Integrity in high places is vital. This stand by Joseph to separate himself from the majority is very difficult. When MPs are called upon to vote they are encouraged to vote on the party line. There have been times when

The Gospel of Mark

godly MPs have entered into very difficult waters, refusing to toe the party line rather than compromise their Christian principles.

Joseph, as a matter of truth and integrity, refused to compromise, refused to go with the popular view. He swam against the tide that was rushing in against the Lord Jesus. This is what it is like for a true Christian in an ungodly world. It is not easy to constantly be swimming, as it were, against the tide, but it is vital to be identified with Jesus. Let us not consent to the antichrist movement in any way. Let us separate from evil thinking. Let us understand that standing and separating for the sake of Jesus is our calling as Christians.

When Joseph ultimately made his stand in the council chamber he was no doubt shouted down. He was just one among many so-called learned men. He was just one who made a stand because he believed in Jesus. The majority were convinced they were right in their judgment against Jesus, but later when the Earth was covered in darkness, when there was an earthquake, and the veil of the Temple torn in two, when Jesus was raised from the dead, these same men had to resort to lies and blackmail to cover themselves. It turned out that Joseph was right in his estimation of Jesus but they were too proud at the time to admit it.

A rich man

The Bible is the most truthful and balanced book in the whole world. In it God determines to demonstrate the scope of the Gospel; it includes men and women, boys and girls, from all walks of life, although the history of the Church shows the Gospel is most readily accepted among the poorer in society. As Jesus says, it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom (*Mark 10.24*).

However, this does not mean that the Gospel is only received by poor people. The Bible clearly shows that some rich people have proved to be pillars in the Church of the living God. For example, Abraham and Job were the richest men of their day. Abraham is a

Standing Up For Jesus

great example of true and living faith. If we have the faith of Abraham we have true faith.

For the Christian believer wealth carries with it a great responsibility. Joseph was rich man who was a godly and wise steward of his substance. Something very special shines through the testimony of Joseph: only the best would do, even for a dead man! There was nothing second-hand about Joseph. One of the things most dishonouring to the Lord is when we give something second-hand to God, something which no longer meets our own standard but is passed on for the work of the Lord.

Joseph was determined to do the best for Jesus even though the body of Jesus was lifeless. Joseph had prepared a tomb. It was freshly hewn out of the rock: no one had ever been laid there. Joseph bore the cost of preparing this tomb. This may have been a step of faith on Joseph's part as he waited for the Kingdom and understood the Scripture. As Jesus fulfilled the prophesy in His life, Joseph became a disciple of Jesus and followed Him. He meditated on the forthcoming death of Jesus, and the purchase of the tomb may have been in readiness for the death of Jesus. Certainly the tomb site was owned by Joseph; it was his own property but it would seem unlikely it was specifically for his own burial as it was alongside the set place for crucifixion, a place of shame.

'Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid' John 19.41.

Whatever the case may be, one thing is certain: Joseph had a deep respect for Jesus. He personally ensured that the body of Jesus was treated with the deepest respect in burial. Joseph, the man of faith, was prepared for this event, together with his friend Nicodemus. Nicodemus, the man who started his Christian life confused and in the dark, coming to Jesus by night, was also now confessing Jesus openly. Calvary emboldened them both.

The Gospel of Mark

Great courage

Joseph going boldly to Pilate to plead the body of Jesus is a testimony to his God-given courage and faith. His faith and love motivated and drove him to Pilate. While before Joseph was fearful of the religious leaders, now he is courageously identifying himself with Jesus. The sufferings and death of Jesus and the circumstances surrounding His death confirmed to Joseph that He was no imposter. That Jesus had most assuredly died is confirmed by both John and the centurion.

‘And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe’ John 19.35.

Joseph realised, like the centurion, that Jesus certainly was Who He said He was. The centurion had already shown great courage in declaring publicly that certainly Jesus was a righteous Man.

The centurion

Consider this hardened Roman soldier. He was a man among men who oversaw crucifixions as a means of justice; a man who was hardened to suffering; one in control; a commander used to ordering people about. The centurion would have been fully aware of the events and the testimony of Jesus under suffering.

- He would have been aware of the humiliation of Jesus; of how Pilate had scourged Him, meaning he whipped Him with rope cords as a public punishment. He saw how the soldiers had stripped Him, put a scarlet robe upon Him, twisted a crown of thorns on His head, put a reed in His right hand, bowed down before Him in false humility saying, ‘Hail King of the Jews’; how they had spat upon Him and struck Him on the head. Through all this terrible suffering the centurion would have noticed Jesus had made no attempts to retaliate.
- He would have been aware of the hateful words hurled at Jesus. He would have heard the taunts, the accusation, the ridicule, the cursing, and the blasphemy. He would have seen and heard the

Standing Up For Jesus

religious leaders and the scribes mocking Him. He would have heard the words of the dying thief who, having stopped cursing Him, afterwards under true conviction said to the other thief, *'Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss'* (Luke 23.40-41). Then he had said to Jesus, *'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom'* (Luke 23.42).

- He would have experienced the darkness which covered the Earth. Whenever has suffering in this world ever brought such a reaction? The awful depths of suffering our Saviour experienced under the divine wrath of the Father! We do not read of Jesus saying anything during that awful three hour period.
- He would have heard the words of Jesus spoken on the cross:

'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' Luke 23.34 – forgiveness of His enemies.

'Woman, behold thy son!...Behold thy mother!' John 19.26-27 – His care and compassion in suffering.

'Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise' Luke 23.43 – reconciliation and Heaven.

'I thirst' John 19.28 – He was a real man with physical needs.

'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mark 15.34 – separation from God.

'It is finished' John 19.30 – the all-sufficient sacrifice has been made.

'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit' Luke 23.46 – He died.

It was the cry before He breathed His last which convinced the

The Gospel of Mark

centurion that Jesus was Who He said He was, the Son of God. It is evident that this last shout was given with great fervour and strength – the depth of the cry, the volume, the heartfelt intensity, followed by a tremendous earthquake, shocked the centurion and those around Him. The cry of suffering of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ brought an earthquake; it split rocks in two, it rent the curtain of Temple in two from the top to the bottom signifying access in Jesus unto the Father.

If we look at the final moments of His death recorded from different aspects in the four *Gospels*, we know that the words, '*It is finished*' form the heart, the depth, and the meaning of the cry. The three words are actually just one word in the original language – finished – meaning the work has been fully and perfectly completed, concluded and full discharge has been made.

The example of Jesus, the events surrounding the crucifixion and ultimately the words of Jesus, demonstrated to the centurion that this was no ordinary run-of-the-mill crucifixion he had overseen. Like Joseph of Arimithaea, he believed this was certainly Someone special Who was on that cross.

'Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man' Luke 23.47.

This was the real Messiah Who must be confessed and given an honourable burial. Here is a statement for your faith to lay hold of – '*Certainly this was a righteous man.*'

Joseph, the centurion, and also Nicodemus demonstrate that true conversion is a fruit of the cross of Christ. It is only as we by faith view the Lord Jesus as the Son of God made Man on the cross that we can be saved. It is only as we look to Him and trust only in Him as Saviour that we can be forgiven and saved.

Respect

God needed someone to bury His Son with respect and dignity. The place was ready, and the man was ready to give what was his. God has people in the right place at the right time. Our greatest privilege is to be part of God's plan to be used in His service like Joseph. Not only Joseph but Nicodemus is included here. Fine linen was used to wrap the body of Jesus. Nicodemus, we are told in the *John* account, provided a hundred pound weight of myrrh and aloes (*John 19.39*). Remember how myrrh was one of the gifts presented to Jesus at His birth. It is now used at His death.

It is important to remember the preparation of Joseph and Nicodemus for this event. It seems they had a God-directed plan. They were ready to act directly Jesus died. They demonstrated heartfelt respect for Jesus, and they used their wealth and possessions in a God-fearing manner.

Conclusion

Joseph and Nicodemus used their God-given riches and wisdom to demonstrate their love for and faith in Jesus. From this account we can see:

- God calls some to high positions;
- God prospers some people for a purpose;
- God gives the grace of integrity to such people;
- God gives them courage to display their banner of faith in Jesus;
- God blesses those who give sacrificially;
- Such people have the highest respect for Jesus;
- Such people give their best for Jesus, they are not second-hand dealers when it comes to God's work;

57. HE IS RISEN!

Mark 16.1-8

It was the faithful women who remained at the cross. When Jesus was suffering the disciples went off. Now here again, at the time of His resurrection, we are told about the bravery of the faithful women. You will notice how respectful the Word of God is to the role of women, this despite the culture of the day when women were treated as second-class servants.

Here the women were concerned to show respect to the body of their Lord and Master Jesus Christ. The Word of God tells us that *'Many waters cannot quench love'* (*Song of Solomon 8.7*). They had witnessed Jesus Christ suffering; they had witnessed the manner of His death. Their spiritual love and respect for Him had deepened beyond anything they had thought possible before. May the Lord touch our hearts likewise as by faith we remember the death of Jesus Christ with a love that insists we must do something to express our love for Him 'no holds barred'.

These faithful women hurried to the tomb for the purpose of anointing the body of Jesus. However, there is an important point to make here. While their faith in Jesus was sincere, it was not yet perfected regarding salvation and Christ Jesus the Lord. The resurrection of Jesus was not something they were expecting. They thought they were going to anoint a dead body. While their love was commendable, their action demonstrated a lack of understanding. It showed that they did not expect what Jesus had taught them before to be fulfilled. For example:

'...saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again' Luke 24.7.

The Gospel of Mark

This reminds us why getting to know the real truth about Jesus is so important for us. God has given us His Word and we need to study it to find out the real truth about Jesus. It is important that we know the Person we are seeking to serve. He is risen!

On the way to the tomb one question seems unanswerable.

'Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?'

Mark 16.3.

The problem was even greater, humanly speaking, than the ladies were aware. They were aware of the manner in which Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus had carefully laid the body of Jesus and the stone rolled against the door of the tomb. However, now the stone had actually been sealed. The entrance was being guarded by Roman soldiers.

'Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch' Matthew 27.62-66.

The situation was impossible for the women because of the seal, the soldiers, and the stone. This reminds us of the times when we face impossible situations – we feel our inability and inadequacy to deal with them. In the event it was the power of the almighty hand of God which worked for them. There was a great earthquake and the angel of the Lord rolled the very large stone away. Satan had put his guards at the stone of the tomb. These guards were there to ensure no one stole the body of Jesus, but they shook for fear and fainted.

He is Risen!

'...and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men' Matthew 28.4.

God says, *'I will work, and who shall let it?'* (Isaiah 43.13). From this we can take encouragement regarding the superabounding power of God. God can walk through and break through and remove any barrier according to His wisdom and power. With the stone rolled away the evidence of an empty tomb was clear for all to see. Just go in and see!

'He is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him'
Mark 16.6.

Later Satan did his best to stop the evidence of that resurrection being known.

'Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day' Matthew 28.11-15.

'He is risen' – a fundamental doctrine to believe

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the mainline truths that we must believe in. This is one of the evidences that we are true children of God. To deny the doctrine of the resurrection is to deny the true faith.

'...and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain' 1 Corinthians 15.14.

'...and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins' 1 Corinthians 15.17.

The Gospel of Mark

Why is the resurrection such a fundamental doctrine for us to believe?

- a. It proves that Jesus is the Son of God;
- b. It verifies Scripture as being truth;
- c. It confirms the acceptance by God the Father of Christ's sufferings and death as the atonement;
- d. It assures us that Christ has gotten the victory over sin, death and hell;
- e. It provides a foretaste of the forthcoming glorious resurrection wherein believers receive glorified bodies;
- f. It inspires confidence and boldness in the Lord's people for witness and service;
- g. It gives hope that is certain;
- h. It comforts us as believers to know we worship a living Saviour;
- i. It encourages us to the Throne of Grace knowing the resurrected, ascended Saviour lives to intercede.

'He is risen!' The resurrection of Jesus was not a figment of the imagination; the resurrection of Jesus is a real and physical fact, and it is as such that we must believe it. To confirm His resurrection beyond reasonable doubt Jesus appeared afterwards on several occasions:

- to Mary Magdalene

'Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils' Mark 16.9.

(See also *John 20.14-18.*)

- to the women returning from the tomb

'And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they

He is Risen!

went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me' Matthew 28.8-10.

- To Peter later in the day

'The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon' Luke 24.34.

'...and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve' 1 Corinthians 15.5.

- to the disciples going to Emmaus in the evening

'And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them' Luke 24.15.

- to the apostles (except Thomas)

'Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst...But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came' John 20.19, 24.

- to the Apostles a week later (Thomas present)

'And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you' John 20.26.

- in Galilee to the seven by the Lake of Tiberias

'After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias' John 21.1.

- in Galilee on a mountain to the apostles and five hundred believers

The Gospel of Mark

'After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep' 1 Corinthians 15.6.

- at Jerusalem and Bethany again to James

'After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles' 1 Corinthians 15.7.

- at Olivet and the ascension

'...to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God...And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight...Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey' Acts 1.3, 9, 12.

- to Saul near Damascus

'And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do' Acts 9.3-6.

'And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time' 1 Corinthians 15.8.

- to Stephen outside Jerusalem

'But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God' Acts 7.55.

- to Paul in the temple

‘And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me’ Acts 22.17-18.

‘And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome’ Acts 23.11.

- to John on Patmos

‘I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet...And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle...And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead’ Revelation 1.10, 12-13, 17.

As the perfect Man in His humanity Jesus could also point to the evidence of His sufferings and to the cross. The evidence of suffering was used by Jesus for the evidence of His resurrection.

‘Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord’ John 20.19-20.

As the Son of God He could breathe out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples.

There are well over three hundred verses concerned with the subject

The Gospel of Mark

of Jesus' resurrection in the New Testament. Paul emphasises the importance and significance of it.

'But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept' 1 Corinthians 15.13-20.

Paul also gives us biblical encouragement in the resurrection.

'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us' Romans 8.34.

The resurrection is a living reality in believers' lives. In forensic science there is what is known as the Locard principle. Simply stated it is that every touch leaves an impression. Many a criminal has rued the day that that principle was discovered. Some of us can vouch for the fact that when our lives have been touched by the risen Lord, it has left an impression. Men and women today testify that the power of the risen Christ has transformed their lives. We know that Jesus is alive, not only because of the historical and biblical evidence, but also because He has miraculously touched our lives and made an indelible impression on them.

One commentator said that the lives of the disciples were revolutionised by the resurrection of Christ. Though they fled and even denied Christ at the time of His arrest and death, later on, after the

He is Risen!

resurrection of Jesus, they feared no one in their proclamation of the risen Christ.

The resurrection was the central message of the early Church. The Church grew with an unwavering conviction that Christ had risen and was Lord of the Church.

‘And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all’ Acts 4.33.

‘The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him’ Acts 5.30-32.

The death and resurrection of Jesus means hope, hope for all those who are putting their trust in Jesus.

‘He is risen!’ – the doctrine which is opposed the most

Most people can live with a good man being crucified, as evidenced by the interest in the film *The Passion of Christ*. However, it is belief in both the death and resurrection of Jesus which defines the reality of our faith. It is this doctrine which is ultimately opposed and rejected the most.

‘And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead’ Acts 4.1-2.

‘Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods:

The Gospel of Mark

because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection...And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter' Acts 17.18, 30-32.

'Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live' John 11.25.

'HE IS RISEN!'

58. CONSEQUENCES OF BELIEF AND UNBELIEF

Mark 16.9-18

The risen Lord ensured the first person He met after resurrection was a remarkable trophy of His grace. In her fallen state by nature before conversion Mary Magdalene lived as a tragic case of devil possession. Mark purposely mentions her state before conversion to magnify the wonders of salvation by grace. The religious leaders, who did not understand grace, considered Mary a worthless, unclean individual, but the Saviour, the Lord Jesus, delivered and forgave Mary all her sin and clothed her with His righteousness.

We read of her demonic deliverance;

'...and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils' Luke 8.2.

of her heartfelt gratitude;

'There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem' Mark 15.40-41.

and of her courageous loyalty to Jesus;

'Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene' John 19.25.

In her converted state, living according to the new nature by faith, Mary was filled with love for her Lord. She is set forth a great trophy

The Gospel of Mark

of grace to remind us of the power of God's salvation in Jesus Christ the Lord. One of the points we need to remind ourselves of here is that when a person is in Christ old things are passed away and all things become new (2 Corinthians 5.17). Mary, who had been in the bondage of Satan, was now in the liberty of Christ.

'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed'
John 8.36.

No doubt Satan still tempted her, accused her, and harassed her, but nothing could separate her from Jesus. So Mary Magdalene out of whom He had cast seven spirits was privileged to take the news that Jesus had risen! Let her testimony be an encouragement to you. Paul said,

'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief' 1 Timothy 1.15.

Unbelief

Here we can see one of the sad characteristics of unbelief – the quenching of spiritual joy. Mary Magdalene hastened to the room where she knew the disciples were hidden for fear of the Jews. In their sadness and confusion they were weeping and mourning. This was not a mourning of the Holy Spirit, but a mourning through the lack of understanding of the Scripture.

Unbelief was taking hold of their minds and hearts and they were sinking in the pit of despair. They were not expecting by faith the resurrection of the Lord, yet Jesus had told them He would rise on the third day! So it was when Mary told them the wonderful news – He is risen indeed and He is alive most assuredly – they did not believe her. Neither did they later believe the two who communed with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

It is important, in the context of this passage, to address the problem of unbelief. There are some characteristics of unbelief for us to

Consequences of Belief and Unbelief

consider for the welfare of our souls. At the heart of unbelief is pride: – in our wisdom, understanding, and self. Unbelief shuts the door on the truth, whether it be a message of warning or comfort. Unbelief shuts the door of your mind and heart to joy and peace in believing. Unbelief is the motive for scepticism. It prides itself in questioning everything and extinguishes faith.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’ Genesis 3.1.

Unbelief assesses truth as idle tales.

‘And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not’ Luke 24.11.

Unbelief always hardens the heart – never softens.

The consequence of dying in unbelief

‘So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief’ Hebrews 3.19.

Never let us toy with unbelief as a plaything of the mind as though it was a right of our wisdom. Unbelief is sin, it is a curse, it only hinders and never helps us.

Now if unbelief troubles you this is a very good sign, for it means you are not comfortable with it. There was a man who said to Jesus once, when challenged about believing in Him, *‘Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief’ (Mark 9.24)* – it troubles me, holds me back; I want to believe wholly in the Lord.

The Lord later appeared to the eleven as they were eating a meal together. There He upbraided them for their unbelief, for their hardness of heart, for their refusal to believe the testimony of their brethren who had actually seen the risen Lord. Jesus rebuked the disciples not

The Gospel of Mark

just for His sake but for rejecting the faithful testimony of others. In their unbelief they were, in effect, accusing their brethren of telling lies. Even more solemn is the fact that unbelief of the Word of God is in effect calling God a liar!

But I want us to notice now how Jesus took those same men, overwhelmed with unbelief, and used them. So it was later that Paul said God has chosen to put His *'treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us'* (2 Corinthians 4.7). God, in His wisdom, is willing to work through cracked pots symbolising our weakness and His excellency.

The Lord Jesus empowered them as the Son of God with the Holy Spirit of God. He gave them a great commission.

'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature'
Mark 16.15.

The Gospel and its promise

The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, defines the Gospel perfectly in *1 Corinthians 15.1-4*:

'Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.'

A great strength of Paul's ministry was his clear, uncompromising understanding of the Gospel message. This is evidenced in the concise manner in which he begins his *Letter to the Romans*. He reveals eight aspects of the Gospel before he makes the powerful statement found in *Romans 1.16-17*.

Consequences of Belief and Unbelief

- a. **Its origin (v 1):** It is the Gospel of God, which means we must respect it as such.
- b. **Its core (v 3):** is the Person and work of Jesus Christ the Lord, which means we must love it.
- c. **Its confirmation (v 4):** is the resurrection, giving us certainty.
- d. **Its fruit (v 5):** is faith and obedience, making it a positive message leading to transformed lives.
- e. **Its extent (v 5):** is to all nations. The UK is now made up of many nations, and the Gospel is for us all.
- f. **Its purpose (v 5):** is the glory of God in Christ Jesus; that is its objective.
- g. **Its call (v 6):** The Gospel is the word of the Holy Spirit, so it has great impact.
- h. **Its heart (v 7):** is grace to you and peace, bringing comfort and assurance.

In *Romans 1.14* Paul acknowledges that he is a debtor to the world in the matter of the Gospel. He understands that it would be wrong to keep this message to himself in a selfish manner; He is under an obligation to preach the Gospel. In this he is a debtor to the world, so Paul states his obligation, willingness and attitude.

How did Paul go about the all-important ministry of preaching the Gospel?

Unashamed identification with the Gospel of God

‘For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ’ Romans 1.16a.

Paul said, ‘I am not ashamed of this message; I identify myself willingly and openly with this message. I know its message can offend people. I know it stirs them up. I know because of it I am persecuted. But nevertheless, because of my love for Christ and the lost, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.’ Why was Paul so sure and un-

The Gospel of Mark

shamed of his message?

Assurance in the Gospel of God

‘..for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek’ Romans 1.16b.

Paul understands and believes for sure that God works through the Gospel. The Gospel reveals the dynamic, saving power of God’s almighty love, grace, and righteousness in Christ. Paul believes this and is therefore assured of the significance of the Gospel.

The Gospel that Paul preached is the same Gospel we must preach simply because God, in His sovereign grace, saves people through the preaching of this Gospel! That is why it is important not to water down or add to the Gospel. God’s honour and glory are at stake.

At the beginning of the last century there was a serious train collision in the USA. Two trains were on the same line, heading for disaster. The guard in the first train realised this and ran down the line waving his red flag to warn the driver of the oncoming train. However, the driver of the second train acknowledged the guard, slowed down but did not stop, leading to a collision. Later in court the driver was asked why he did not stop when he saw the red flag. He replied that the flag he saw was not red. The flag was brought out into the court, and all could see that it was no longer red; it had faded to an orange. An orange flag meant, ‘Slow down!’ The disaster could have been avoided if more care had been taken.

We are called to wave the red flag of the Gospel, not a faded flag. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to apply the Gospel message for it to have any lasting effect upon our lives, but the Holy Spirit of God, the third Person of the Trinity, will not apply anything for salvation but the true Gospel. This is the *‘power of God unto salvation’*. It rescues a person from guilt and brings them to a state of righteousness; from pollution to holiness; from slavery to freedom; from punishment to

Consequences of Belief and Unbelief

blessedness. It rescues from alienation from God to fellowship with God; from the wrath of God to the love of God in the heart; and saves from everlasting death to everlasting life.

The righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel

‘For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith’ Romans 1.17a.

The Gospel tells us of a righteousness from God which God provided for us in Jesus Christ. The very righteousness God’s holiness demands is bestowed through Jesus Christ. He honoured and satisfied the law of God in His life because of His perfect obedience and righteousness. Jesus Christ died upon the cross, taking upon Himself the sinner’s punishment demanded by a holy God. When a sinner believes in Jesus, His righteousness is put to his account, wiping out the debt of his sin. This means he can stand before a holy God clean and clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Belief

‘He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned’ Mark 16.16.

Jesus did not say those that have enough good works, or righteousness, or are born into a God-fearing family. Jesus said: *‘He that believeth.’* He who believes in My name as the only name given under Heaven whereby we are saved; he that is baptised. Baptism is the outward sign of conversion ordained by Jesus. Baptism is an ordinance full of symbolism demonstrating our faith in the death and resurrection of the Lord. While baptism does not save us, when entered into as a converted believer it does evidence our salvation. The emphasis Jesus puts here for salvation is belief – He that believes – He that does not believe – but we should never underestimate the significance of baptism for it is one way of bringing glory to Jesus

‘If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead,

The Gospel of Mark

thou shalt be saved' Romans 10.9.

Here Jesus said if we believe we shall be saved. From what? Eternal damnation – not be damned to eternal punishment in hell. Unbelief is a curse leading to hell! Belief is a blessing leading to Heaven. Unbelief is defined by whether we believe or reject the Gospel, for he who rejects the Son rejects the Father and the Holy Spirit. We cannot say we believe in God while rejecting the Gospel.

Signs

'And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover' Mark 16.17-18.

These were special signs for a special time.

'And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance...Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls' Acts 2.4, 41.

'And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people' Acts 5.12.

'Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them' Acts 9.39.

'And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm' Acts 28.5.

Until their ministry was accomplished the apostles were protected in a most remarkable manner. Their ministry was accompanied with

Consequences of Belief and Unbelief

the most remarkable signs for the establishment of the Gospel. Now we have the final revealed and inspired Word of God as the great sign for our ministry. We know the power of God is not shortened in that He does heal and protect according to His divine will, but these remarkable signs were given for the specific purpose of establishing the Gospel.

59. THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD – THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Mark 16.19-20

The ascension: the heritage of the Lord

It is sometimes said that the words of a dying man are profound and to the point. This certainly had been the case with the Lord Jesus as His words on the cross are clearly recorded for us. But now we do not have the words of a dying Man, but the words of a Man risen from the dead. If the words of the dying Lord were profound, the words of the risen Lord must be equally profound. As we look at some of the evidences of His words as a risen Man we see the Lord preparing His disciples.

- Words of teaching: the two on the road to Emmaus:

‘Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself... And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?’ Luke 24.25-27, 32.

- Words of rebuke: the disciples in the upper room:

‘Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen’ Mark 16.14.

- Words of revelation: the revelation of the body, and of the Scripture:

The Gospel of Mark

'And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures' Luke 24.36-45.

- Words of instruction: the desire of Christ centred in the Gospel:

'...and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high' Luke 24.46-49.

'When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in

The Ascension of the Lord – The Presence of the Lord

all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth' Acts 1.6-8.

- Words of encouragement: Peter at his restoration:

Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me' John 21.12-19.

- Words of commission: all the world, a commission for all time:

'And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature Mark 16.15.

'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the

The Gospel of Mark

Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen' Matthew 28.18-20.

- Words of blessing: peace and the Holy Spirit:

'And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you' John 20.20-21.

The ascension: the reception of the Lord

The glorious re-entry and reception of Christ in His resurrected body into Heaven was triumphant.

'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah' Psalm 24.7-10.

The angels marvelled and wondered at the sight for they had never witnessed a human body in Heaven before. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of glory! Heaven is a spiritual realm with one exception – the God-Man Christ Jesus. He is the surety for the future.

After the Resurrection Day, Heaven will be filled by saved persons each with a glorified body and soul. When a believer dies before the end of the world their soul, their spirit, goes immediately into Heaven. Their earthly remains await, being depicted as sleeping, to be resurrected on the last day as a glorified body. The soul will be reunited with the body and be like Jesus the Man with a glorified body and soul.

But Jesus is already arisen, resurrected from the dead, and He has

The Ascension of the Lord – The Presence of the Lord

been received back into Heaven as such. He is received back into Heaven as the victorious One.

The ascension: the authority of the Lord

There is a vital point being taught here in the Word of God. Our Lord did not just ascend back into Heaven as the God-Man Christ Jesus to dwell; He also returned to His original dwelling place in Heaven by God the Father to rule and reign. Jesus said:

‘Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God’ Luke 22.69.

The New Testament letters constantly refer to the fact of Christ having ascended into Heaven and now reigning in authority.

‘[God] raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places’ Ephesians 1.20.

‘...who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high’ Hebrews 1.3.

‘...but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God’ Hebrews 10.12.

‘Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him’ 1 Peter 3.22.

‘Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name’ Philippians 2.9.

The ascension of Christ is recorded for our assurance and encouragement.

‘Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession’ Hebrews 4.14.

The Gospel of Mark

'For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us' Hebrews 9.24.

' Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God' Hebrews 12.2.

The Lord Jesus sits on the throne to rule and stands up from the throne to receive into Heaven.

'But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God' Acts 7.55-56.

The presence of the Lord

The life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord was an inspiration for the obedience of the disciples. His words must be obeyed; they were promised power from on high; they were promised His presence; He would send the Holy Spirit to bless the Gospel.

Here we are taught the Lord will always presence Himself with those who truly preach the Gospel. It is to those He has promised His presence and the unction of the Holy Spirit. The greatest sign that God gives is the sign of true conversion. There is no greater miracle than this. Conversion comes through the message of the Gospel. It is the message the Holy Spirit will bless. All those who preach the Gospel are promised the presence of Jesus Christ: not only His presence but His working with them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things

The Ascension of the Lord – The Presence of the Lord

whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen' Matthew 28.18-20.

Conclusion

We have concluded our series in the *Gospel of Mark* by focusing upon the Person and work of the Jesus Christ. May the Lord be pleased to most assuredly bless the teaching of His Word for the blessing of many souls.