

# The Royal Majesty of the Kingdom



**SENIOR NOTES – 15 Years and over**

**STAGE FOUR OF FIVE STAGES**

CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION  
P.O. BOX 121, ST. AGNES 5097. SOUTH AUSTRALIA



*“They saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.”*

**John 21:9**

# CHRISTADELPHIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

## SENIOR NOTES — STAGE 4

### FOREWORD

These lessons make up the fourth of five stages which cover the whole scope of the Bible. In this stage we shall consider the life and works of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and so the title chosen is—

#### **“THE ROYAL MAJESTY OF THE KINGDOM”**

In many ways this stage is the climax of what has gone before and it is therefore the highlight of our lessons.

As we look closely at the Son of God we shall come to realise that he is the only begotten Son who revealed his Father’s glory. We shall see that no other man before or since has done such mighty works or spoken such profound wisdom in simple words. We hope that the student might join with the centurion who stood at the foot of the Cross and say, “Truly this man is the Son of God”.

The attention of teachers is drawn to the fact that the lessons have been written somewhat fully. This has been done in order to preserve the drama and hold the interest of the reader. It is not anticipated that all matters referred to in the notes will be covered in time allotted for lessons. The examination questions will be based upon the questions at the end of each lesson and therefore it is important that these be consulted so that they are covered during the lesson. The questions have been designed to test knowledge of the point of a lesson.

Care has been taken in deciding what lessons to include and which to leave out. While all may not agree with the selection, it has been the endeavour of the Committee to present a balanced digest of the important principles and teachings of the Lord, as seen in his preaching, his example, his miracles and his parables. Sometimes it has been necessary to omit a well-known incident because the lesson emerging from it has been adequately dealt with elsewhere.

No attempt has been made to present a comprehensive sequential picture of the ministry of the Lord. To do so in the scope of these notes would be confusing and would detract from the object of the notes: to come to know the Son of God. The lessons do, however, follow the order of their happening. The immediate context of a lesson is mentioned only if the theme of the lesson is assisted thereby.

It is the sincere hope of the Committee that these lessons might aid the development of Christ’s character and ways in others so that there might be a holy seed ready and waiting for him when he comes.

The Committee, Christadelphian Sunday School Association

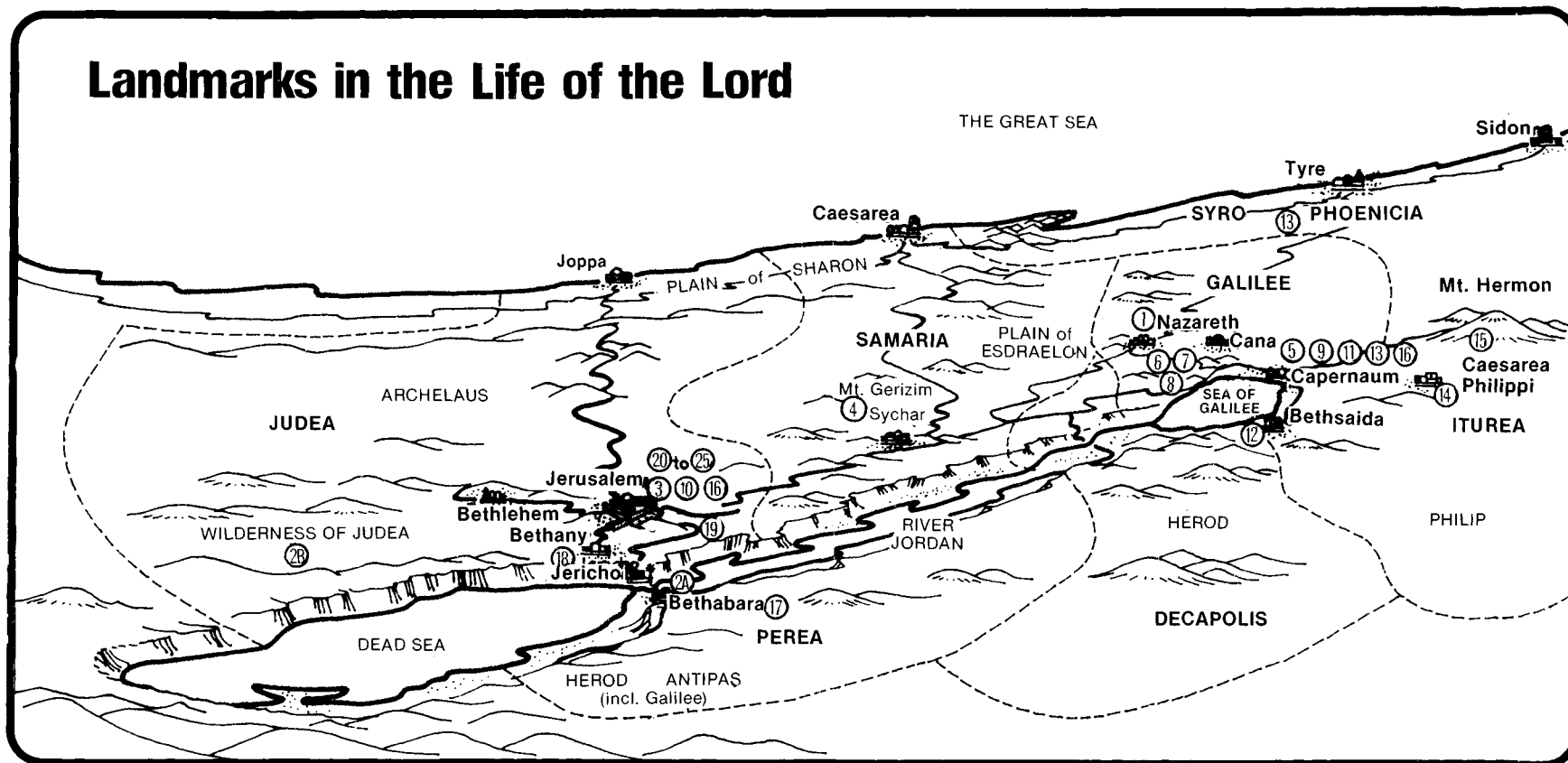
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# Landmarks in the Life of the Lord



The Lesson Headings are numbered and the map indicates the locality of the events, etc.

- |                        |                         |                                  |                                |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Early Life          | 5. Disciples Called     | 12. Feeding the Multitude        | 19. Behold, your King          |
| 2. Baptism 2A          | 6. Beatitudes           | 13. Defilement and Hypocrisy     | 20. Answering His Opponents    |
| 3. Temptation 2B       | 7. Principles in Action | 14. Gathering Opposition         | 21. The Olivet Prophecy        |
| 4. Nicodemus           | 8. Praying              | 15. Jesus is Transfigured        | 22. Last Parables (Matt. 25)   |
| 5. Accepted at Samaria | 9. Miracles of Healing  | 16. Jesus Teaches Forgiveness    | 23. Last Supper and Gethsemane |
|                        | 10. Bethesda Healing    | 17. Parables of Finding the Lost | 24. Trial and Crucifixion      |
|                        | 11. The Sower           | 18. Raising Lazarus              | 25. Alive from the Dead        |

## Section 1

# THE PREPARATION AND PRESENTATION OF THE KING

The fullness of time had come and God “sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.” But 30 years of preparation was required before that Son would be revealed—years of study, years of dedication to his Father. “How is it that ye sought me?” he said when he was but twelve years of age. “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk. 2:49 RSV). Years of preparation often seem to lack challenge and excitement, but viewed in retrospect, they can be seen to be years needing intensive care.

Then came the public ministry of the Lord. First his baptism, accompanied by the voice from heaven: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”; then after his temptation John points him out as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”; then to Jerusalem where the Jews recoil at the words of the new preacher, “Make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise”. His introduction is completed as he is revealed as a man sent from God to two people at the opposite ends of the social spectrum—to Nicodemus, a master of the Law, and to a woman, a Samaritan.

The future King of the earth had arrived. His ministry had begun.

## 1. JESUS' EARLY LIFE

**“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man”**

*Our last lesson for Stage Three took us to the events surrounding the birth of Jesus up to the adoration of the shepherds in the field when they received the angelic messengers, and had seen the Messiah of Israel. We take up the life of Jesus from this point.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to watch the Lord being prepared for his great work and to learn the need for us to prepare also for his service in our youth.*

### **Luke 2:21-52; Matthew 2**

#### **CIRCUMCISION AND FIRST VISIT TO THE TEMPLE (Lk. 2:21-38).**

Eight days after his birth, the Son of God was circumcised according to the Law and was named JESUS (Yahweh will save), as the angel had instructed Mary at the time she conceived (Lk. 1:31). Circumcision originated in the time of Abraham as a token of the covenant God made with him (Gen. 17:9-11). Thus it was appropriate, as well as being necessary (Gal. 4:4), for Jesus, who was to fulfil the covenant, to be circumcised. We follow his example when we cut off “the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24, 25; Rom. 2:28, 29).

Thirty-three days later, in accordance with the Law (Lev. 12:4, 6), Mary took Jesus and went with Joseph to the Temple at Jerusalem to offer the sacrifice required for the purification, and “to present him to the Lord”. Since the time God slew the Egyptians’ first-born and saved Israel’s alive, He had claimed their first-born as His own (v.23; Ex. 13:1, 2). How pre-eminently was this true of Jesus, who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26).

Joseph and Mary would appear to have been among the poorer class in Israel, because their offering was a “pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons” (Lev. 12:8). To all outward appearances, this visit was no different to any other on that day or former days. But apart from Joseph and Mary, there were two others who knew differently and were to proclaim their joy at the consummation of long years of watching and hoping.

Simeon had been told by God’s Spirit to go into the Temple on this day, for his “waiting for the consolation of Israel” was at an end (vv.25-27). Can we imagine his expectations as he made his way to the Temple? His exaltation would be complete when he finally “took Jesus up in his arms, and blessed God” (v.28). The babe was to become God’s salvation and the enlightenment he would bring was to

spread to Gentiles as well as Jews (vv.30-32). With what amazement Joseph and Mary listened to these words — “a light to lighten the Gentiles” (v.33). But this was not all; Mary herself would suffer much before “all these sayings in her heart” became meaningful to her (vv.35, 51).

As Simeon was finishing his prophecy, a widow of 84 years, Anna, entered and spoke also of the redemption to be accomplished by Jesus (vv.36-38).

### **THE VISIT OF THE MAGI (Matt. 2:1-12).**

Perhaps only a few in Jerusalem heard of the strange happenings when Jesus was presented to the Lord at the Temple, but an event now occurred that set all Jerusalem talking (v.3). Wise men from the east arrived seeking him “that was born King of the Jews” (v.2). These “wise men” (Gk. “magi”) may have been associated with the school of wise men instructed by Daniel in Babylon some six hundred years earlier (Dan. 2:48). They may have heard of Daniel’s prophecy of the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24, 25), as could be implied by the narrative at the end of verse 16.

The watching of the Magi had not been fruitless: the star they had been waiting for appeared and directed them to the presence of Jesus. What a contrast to the attitude of Herod and all Jerusalem: Gentiles sought him, but his own people were troubled by the tidings. Simeon’s words of a short time before were even now commencing to have meaning.

Herod, whose hands were already stained with blood and intrigue, saw in the birth of him that “was born King of the Jews” a threat to his cherished position. He found out from the chief priests and scribes that Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem (vv.4-6; Mic. 5:2). To avoid rousing the people, he privately summoned the wise men and told them to report back to him when they had found Jesus that he might “come and worship him also” (vv.7-8).

As the wise men started for Bethlehem, the star re-appeared and guided them to their destination. Mary and Joseph had by now found a house (v.11) and there the Magi fell down and worshipped Jesus and presented their gifts. These gifts were both very costly and appropriate to the occasion:—

1. **Gold** — as well as symbolising immortality which results from a faith well-tried, gold is a gift appropriate for a king (cp. 1 Kgs. 10).
2. **Frankincense** — used as an ingredient in the incense which was a symbol for prayer (Ex. 30:34). In his name prayer would be made to the Father (Jn. 16:23).
3. **Myrrh** — an ingredient used in the oil for anointing priests to office. Jesus is “the Christ”, the **anointed** prophet, priest and king of God (Ex. 30:23; Jn. 3:34). Myrrh also speaks of bitterness and death, so Jesus’ sacrificial work is also envisaged.



Having presented their gifts and homage to Israel's Messiah, they were warned of God not to report back to Herod (v.12). They returned home another way, doubtless rejoicing as they went, and leaving Herod impatiently fuming over their seeming delay.

### **FLIGHT TO EGYPT: HEROD'S REACTION (Matt. 2:13-18).**

Herod was furious when he learnt that the Magi had disobeyed and avoided him. In a brutal and callous rage he ordered that every child from two years old and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding districts was to be slain (v.16). His action was monstrous and criminal. History was repeating itself; "Rachel", the symbolical mother of natural Israel, was again in weeping over the loss of children. The words of Jer. 31:15 were uttered when "Rachel" bemoaned the long lines of captives being carried away to Babylon. She was consoled by the promise of return. Now, with Herod's cruel stroke, "Rachel" was weeping once more. Rachel, Jacob's wife, was a fitting symbol of natural Israel, for she experienced sorrow both in being unable to bear children for a time (Gen. 30:1), and at her death in giving birth to Benjamin (whom she called "Ben-oni", son of my sorrow; Gen. 35:16-19). She was buried in the vicinity of Bethlehem (Gen. 48:7), the scene of Herod's atrocities.

The burning jealousy and wrath of King Herod was no match for the providence of Yahweh. No mortal man, however powerful, can thwart the purpose of God. We, too, can take comfort from the fact that God loves us and cares for us and will deliver us from all evil. In fact, the hideous action of Herod's crime was to lead to the fulfilment of prophecy! God was using the scheme of men to further His purpose. Natural Israel, Yahweh's first-born son, had been called forth out of Egypt to nationhood (Ex. 4:22), and now Jesus was to re-enact that historic occasion (vv.13-15; Hos. 11:1). The principle reaches down to ourselves as well. We, too, as the sons of God, are called forth out of darkness (Egypt) to show the glory of Yahweh (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Eph. 2:1-3, 13). Natural Israel will yet again re-live this scene in the second exodus after Christ's return (Mic. 7:14-15; Isa. 11:10-16).

### **FROM EGYPT TO NAZARETH (Matt. 2:19-23).**

When Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph with the message to return to Israel (vv.19-21). On reaching the Land, Joseph heard that Archelaus reigned in place of his father Herod. Once more Joseph was told by God what to do. Joseph came to Galilee where Herod Antipas, a milder person, reigned, and settled at Nazareth (vv.22-23). Matthew tells us that this was done "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets. He shall be called a Nazarene". There is no specific prophecy to this effect in the Old Testament, but the word Nazareth has the significance of a "branch" and there are several prophecies that speak of Jesus as a branch (cp.

Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; 33:14-16; Zech. 3:8; 6:12). Nazareth was despised by the Jews, as appears in Jn. 1:46; 7:41, 42, 52. Again the wisdom of God shines forth in that the work accomplished in His Son would have no associations with wealth, status or position in this life.

We have no record of the childhood of Jesus excepting the comment made by Luke: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him" (Lk. 2:40).

Isaiah refers to this growth of God's Son in chapter 11:2-3. It was in these years of preparation, that Jesus formed those necessary habits of communion with His Father and of meditation upon His word that were his source of strength during his ministry. We can imagine him upon the hills surrounding Nazareth in the early hours of the morning meditating on the divine history which had taken place on the plain of Esdraelon, Mount Tabor, Mount Carmel and other places he could see. In those years he pondered the significance of the prophecies concerning his work. During his ministry it was his practice to use the early hours of the day in communion with His Father.

The extent of Jesus' education is illustrated by an important event in his life when he was twelve years old.

#### **JESUS' FIRST PASSOVER (Lk. 2:42-50).**

Each year his parents attended the Passover Feast. When Jewish boys turned 12 years of age they took upon themselves the responsibility to keep the Law of Moses. As this important time approached, much time and effort was expended in memorising the Law. So profound was the understanding of the Son of God at this age, that the doctors of the Law were astonished.

We can imagine the atmosphere of expectancy as the family prepared for the journey to Jerusalem. How he would contemplate the significance of the Passover, both in its historical context, and, as the years went by, with deepening awareness of his personal involvement in it! This Passover in Jerusalem must have been a joyous occasion.

Returning home with the company of friends and relatives, Joseph and Mary did not miss Jesus until a whole day's journey had gone (vv.43-45). When their search for him failed they returned quickly to Jerusalem. But even there it was not until the third day that they discovered him in the Temple, both asking and answering questions of the Doctors of Law (vv.46-47).

Joseph and Mary were relieved but puzzled at his seeming thoughtlessness. Mary, in her relief, reproached her son with the words: "Why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (v.48). Such a comment was natural in the circumstances but then they were not dealing with THEIR son only but God's as well. Jesus revealed his understanding of his relationship in his reply as he gently reminded Mary that he was not the son of Joseph: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?", or

in the Revised Version, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" So profound was his fear of God that to him it seemed perfectly natural that he should be absorbed in the matters of his Father (vv.49-50).

### **GROWTH TO MANHOOD (Lk. 2:51-52).**

Nothing more is said of the life of Jesus from this Passover until his appearance on the banks of Jordan at the age of 30 years, except the summary recorded in Lk. 2:52, and what can be inferred from his comments during his ministry. He did not attend any of the great centres of learning but very regularly he attended the synagogue (Lk. 4:16, 22). Jesus followed Joseph and became a carpenter. It seems that Joseph died during this period as we have no record of him during the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was the eldest of a large family consisting of four brothers and at least two sisters (Mk. 6:3). Placed in such a responsible position as the head and provider, he would have learned much about human nature and increased in discernment, judgment, and mercy, so fully revealed in his ministry. Many of the figures of speech he used and the parables spoken doubtless had their origin in his early life in Nazareth.

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus was circumcised and we follow his example by crucifying the lusts and desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:24, 25; Col. 3:1-5).
- A few expectant Jews, like Simeon and Anna, awaited his coming. We should have the same spirit of excitement and expectancy as we await his second coming (2 Tim. 4:8; Matt. 24:42-47; Lk. 21:34-36).
- God protected His Son from the cruel hand of Herod. As His sons and daughters we can take consolation and comfort that the Father will protect and care for us too (Ps. 34:6-8; Rom. 8:31-39).
- As Jesus came out of Egypt, so we leave the darkness of the world and come into the glorious light of the truth (1 Pet. 2:9-10; 1 Thess. 5:4-6).
- In His wisdom God chose despised Nazareth as the place of preparation for His Son. Wealth, prestige, status, and learning very often constitute obstacles in the path of spiritual growth (Phil. 3:7-8; 1 Cor. 1:17-18, 26-31).
- Jesus' sense of purpose was evident at an early age. Even though he was a vessel specially prepared of Yahweh, we should remember Solomon's words, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth . . ." (Ecc. 12:1). God has a purpose with us too.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- "The Story of the Bible" (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, Pages 29-67  
"A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Book 1, Chapters 2-5  
"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 8-10

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What events occurred when Jesus was taken to the Temple following his mother's period of cleansing?*
2. *What gifts did the Magi bring to the young Jesus and what were their significance?*
3. *What factors aided the development of Jesus prior to his ministry at the age of 30 years?*
4. *What significant event took place at the Temple when Jesus was 12 years of age? What does it show about Jesus' attitude?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Discuss the providence of Yahweh in the early life of Jesus.*
2. *Describe the visit of the Magi in search of Jesus and the lessons to us in their coming to him.*
3. *Outline the events which led to Jesus being taken by Joseph and Mary from Bethlehem to Egypt and then to Nazareth. What Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in these movements?*
4. *Outline the things that we know about Jesus' boyhood and growth to manhood. What was Mary's attitude to these? What lessons do we learn from this?*

## **2. JESUS IS BAPTISED AND TEMPTED**

**“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”**

*We have come to the point of time when Jesus is ready to be revealed publicly to Israel. His personal preparation at Nazareth for this work is complete and at the same time the people are being prepared for this appearance by the preaching of his cousin, John the Baptist.*

*The aim of this lesson is to see the example that the Lord set before us in the matters of baptism and temptation.*

### **Matthew 3; 4:1-11**

#### **JOHN’S CALL TO REPENTANCE (Matt. 3:1-6).**

John the Baptist was very similar in appearance and disposition to his famous precursor, Elijah. Both were clad in the rough clothing that marked out prophets, and were stern and abrupt in manner (vv.3-4; 2 Kgs. 1:8). John’s purpose was to quicken the minds of the people of Israel so that they might be ready to receive the word of the Kingdom from their Messiah. The people had become complacent and ritualistic in their approach to Yahweh and needed to change their hearts in order that the seed of the gospel might take root in fallow ground (v.3).

John’s message came from Isaiah 40:3-8. He was the voice of one crying to the wilderness of hearts before him, for men to renounce their waywardness, confess their sins and be baptised to acknowledge their condition. The Glory of God was about to be revealed. In preparation God required acknowledgement from the people that “all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field” as the basis for repentance. John’s preaching was effective and widespread (v.5), for even the leaders, the Pharisees and Saducees, came to hear him.

#### **JOHN’S FORTHRIGHTNESS AND HIS PROPHECY**

**(Matt. 3:7-12).**

John was fearless and direct in his denunciation of the rulers of Israel. He called them “vipers” and the seed of the serpent. They certainly were shown to be such by subsequent events (Isa. 59:2-8). It was no good relying as they did, on fleshly genealogies, stretching right back to Abraham, because the very point of John’s message was that “**ALL flesh is grass.**” “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (v.9). It was appropriate that John should have preached in the same area where Joshua crossed the River Jordan for there Joshua set up stones to memorialise God’s provision for His people and there Israel was circumcised, thus repudiating the “flesh” (Josh. 4:20; 5:8-9). The axe of divine judgment was soon to cut down those trees that did not bring forth good fruit and John vigorously

warned them that their self-righteous hypocrisy was not hidden from God's eyes. He told them plainly "Bear fruit that befits repentance" (v. 8 RSV).

But John was the forerunner of Messiah and, as such, the central theme of his preaching concerned "one mightier than himself" who was about to be revealed. John's baptism revealed flesh for what it is, but this one to come was to set before them the choice — the power of the Holy Spirit or judgment: the wheat he would gather to himself, but those of no substance would be like chaff burnt with unquenchable fire (v.12). Judgment for rejection would bring desolation and dispersion, but for the moment the choice lay before them.

### **THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (Matt. 3:13-15).**

John's baptism was one of repentance from sins, so when Jesus came to him, John protested that he had "need to be baptised" by Jesus rather than vice versa (v.14). Jesus, however, insisted that John baptise him, saying, "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness" (v.15). Why was this so? Jesus certainly had no sins to confess, but he knew and recognised the nature that he bore, in common with all humanity. In being baptised he acknowledged that God is righteous whereas "ALL flesh is grass". Though personally sinless, his flesh would pass away like any other man's, unless sustained by the Word of God. We, too, acknowledge this principle when we are baptised. Not only do we receive forgiveness through God's mercy, but we acknowledge the justice of God in requiring that human nature with its tendency to evil must be put to death (Rom. 3:23-26; 6:6-7). If Jesus considered it necessary to be baptised, how important must it be for each of us to diligently consider this matter, especially as we, unlike him, are in need of forgiveness.

### **THE RESPONSE FROM HEAVEN (Matt. 3:16-17).**

There followed immediately upon Jesus' baptism, the confirmation of his position as Messiah, for the Spirit of God came upon him (v.16). John had been told by God that this would be the sign identifying the Messiah (Jn. 1:32-33). The dove was not the only indication given — a voice from heaven also proclaimed the words, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (v. 17). Thus began the ministry of the Son of God. He was heralded by these unmistakable signs, and the words which followed left no doubt that he was the Messiah of Israel.

### **THE TEMPTATION IN THE WILDERNESS (Matt. 4:1-11).**

Hundreds of years before, God had tried his national son, Israel, for forty years in the wilderness. That "son" had failed Him. Now His only beloved Son was about to be tempted in all points "like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). This time the victory would be God's and the way opened to bring many sons to glory.

Jesus was tempted in the three ways that sin arises, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16). He overcame all these suggestions of the tempter and so honoured God. The ‘second Adam’ succeeded where the first failed, for in the garden of Eden these very same desires caused the downfall of Adam and Eve. The table that follows compares these incidents.

“ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD” 1 John 2:16	THE DOWNFALL IN EDEN Genesis 3:6	THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS Matthew 4	JESUS’ REPLY TO THE TEMPTER Matthew 4
‘the lust of the flesh’	‘tree was good for food’	v.3-“command these stones be made bread”	v.4-“Man shall not live by bread alone”
“the lust of the eyes”	“pleasant to the eyes”	v.8-“sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world”	v.10-“Thou shalt Worship the Lord thy God”
“the pride of life”	“tree to be desired to make one wise”	v.6-“If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down”	v.7-“Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God”

The replies of Jesus all came from the book of Deuteronomy. This suggests that Jesus was thinking of the experiences of Israel in the wilderness and the reproofs and exhortations Moses gave them because they failed. Jesus heeded these lessons and, through the strength derived from His Father, overcame those weaknesses common to us all.

#### **APPEAL TO THE LUST OF THE FLESH: STONES INTO BREAD (Matt. 4:2-4).**

Jesus had been in close communication with his Father and had been fasting for forty days and nights. This number forty is significant for it relates to probation and testing (cp. Num. 14:33-34; Jonah 3:4-10). Jesus would have been exceedingly hungry and the first suggestion by the tempter played upon this fact. The tempter wanted Jesus to demonstrate that he was indeed the Son of God and that he could satisfy the needs of the flesh by turning the stones into bread. But Jesus recalled that God had caused Israel to “suffer hunger” so that they might learn to place their trust in Yahweh and not in the power of the flesh (Deut. 8:3). God’s Spirit was not given in order to satisfy personal desires. Jesus’ mind centred on the words of Moses as he remembered that God had led Israel in the wilderness that he might “prove them to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or not” (Deut. 8:2). His answer and his rebuttal of the tempter — **“man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”** — demonstrated that his food and drink was the Word of God and that he would not be deflected from his purpose (v.4).

### **APPEAL TO THE PRIDE OF LIFE: CAST THYSELF DOWN FROM THE TEMPLE (Matt. 4:5-7).**

The tempter then took a different approach by appealing to Jesus to demonstrate that he was the Son of God by jumping off a pinnacle of the temple and being rescued by the angels. Why, did not the Psalmist prophesy that the angels would “bear thee up lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Ps. 91:11-12)? But the tempter misapplied the Psalm. Jesus was not deceived by this guise. He knew that the Psalm set clear limitations on how God would protect him. The Psalmist stated that God’s protection was afforded because he had placed his trust in God and not in the ways of the wicked (Ps. 91:2-4, 8-10). To use this protection to demonstrate fleshly pride was against the whole spirit of the Psalm.

Again the mind of Jesus went to Israel in the wilderness. At Massah and Meribah Israel were thirsty and began to murmur and doubt the presence of Yahweh: “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Ex. 17:7). They had issued a challenge to God, and by seeking to impose on Him a mode of behaviour which they had devised they were making God subservient to their own wills. They were telling God what to do, on pain of their disbelief in Him, if He did not do it. As the supreme reality of the universe, it is not God but men who are to be put to the test, for as Exodus 15:25 says: “there HE proved THEM”. God is not to be made subject to men’s desires: they are to be conformed to Him, not He to them. It was this lesson which Moses distilled from this experience when he reviewed their history at the end of their wanderings (Deut. 6:16).

In his answer to the second temptation, therefore, Christ vindicated the supremacy of God by refusing to make God’s will serve his own. “**Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God**”. He knew that God was with him—at his recent baptism God’s power had come upon him and His voice had spoken approval of him—and to have required further confirmation was tantamount to disbelief on his part and a temptation of God.

### **APPEAL TO THE LUST OF THE EYES: THE GLORY OF THE KINGDOMS (Matt. 4:8-10).**

Finally the tempter portrayed to the eyes of the Lord the glory of the kingdoms of the world, promising them to him if he would submit to him — “all these will I give if you will fall down and worship me” (v.9). Jesus could have immediately received universal dominion without sufferings and the cross. But he knew that the cross had to come before the crown. Again there was no hesitation in his decision. He would not, like the first Adam, grasp at equality with God (Phil. 2:5-7 RSV). He remembered again the words of Moses to Israel that **Yahweh** had given them the victory and had brought them to the promised land. There was nothing to be gained by Israel worshipping the gods of the nations around them, for their strength and victory lay with Yahweh (Deut. 6:10-15). Israel failed in this matter, but Jesus accepted the purpose of Yahweh with him, despite the sorrow and



suffering. He would not yield to a more comfortable way and so, he replies, **“thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”** (Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13).

The tempter now left Jesus “for a season” and the angels of God came “and ministered unto him” (v.11). We can but faintly imagine the sweet communion involved, as the angels strengthened Jesus in mind and body for the days yet to come.

## **OVERCOMING TEMPTATION.**

This record of the temptation of Jesus helps us in our endeavours to overcome our own temptations. James reminds us that “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (Jas. 1:14-15). When the tempter came to Jesus, the Lord dismissed his suggestions and caused his mind to dwell upon the lessons Moses impressed Israel with before he died. From this record he gained strength and the answer to the tempter’s suggestions.

There are important lessons here for us. The way to overcome temptation is to think upon God’s word and it will give us strength of conviction and the answers to our problems. Prayer to our Father in heaven will also greatly assist. As John says, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 Jn. 5:4). That faith is developed by absorbing the Word of God and the mind of Christ, so that temptation will find no idle thought upon which it can feed. Our minds are always active and thoughts of all kinds are constantly being generated. How are we going to keep the stream of thought pure? Jesus, like the Psalmist, meditated day and night on the Law of Yahweh (Ps. 1:2). Good thoughts will displace evil thoughts by providing no room for them. Thus the apostle encourages us to think positively: “whatsoever things are true . . . honest . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, **THINK ON THESE THINGS**” (Phil. 4:8). Our victory over temptation, like Jesus’ victory, begins in the mind.

## **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The message of John the Baptist has particular relevance in our generation. Today man is puffed up in vanity and we need to appreciate that “all flesh is grass” (1 Pet. 1:23-25; Jas. 4:13-17).
- Jesus’ coming brought judgment; men would either choose to serve him or be rejected. With Christ at the door we have the same choice and sense of urgency. Let us choose the power of God in His word and develop His character (2 Pet. 3:11-14; Lk. 21:34-36).
- Jesus considered it necessary to acknowledge God’s righteousness in baptism. How much more necessary is it for ourselves, needing as we do, the forgiveness of God as well (Acts 2:37-38; 19:1-5).
- Jesus overcame the suggestions of the tempter because his mind was immersed in the Word of God—“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5-11).

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, Pages 69-89  
“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 2, Chapters 3, 4  
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 11

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What did Jesus mean when he said to John the Baptist: “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness”?*
2. *How was Jesus shown to be the Messiah at his baptism? How did John recognise him as such?*
3. *What are the three ways that the apostle John says sin arises? Connect these three ways with the threefold temptation of Jesus.*
4. *Outline the main purpose of the ministry of John the Baptist.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Why was Jesus baptised? Mention in your answer why it is also necessary for us to be baptised.*
2. *How does Jesus contrast with Adam and Eve and with Israel in the matter of his temptation?*
3. *How was Jesus able to overcome in the Temptation? What lessons can we learn from His example?*

### 3. NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS BY NIGHT

**“We know that thou art a teacher come from God”**

*After Jesus had done his first miracle of turning water into wine in Cana, he travelled north to Capernaum. There he remained with his mother, his brethren, and his disciples for a short time. When the Passover approached, Jesus travelled south to Jerusalem. Thus commenced what has been called his Early Judean Ministry, the events of which are recorded only in John. This Passover was the first feast of his ministry, and his first public appearance in the capital. John records two major events — the cleansing of the Temple and Nicodemus’ visit by night.*

*The aim of this lesson is to see that God must be worshipped in holiness and to understand the need to respond to the work performed in His Son.*

#### **John 2:13-25; 3:1-21**

#### **CLEANSING THE TEMPLE (Jn. 2:13-22).**

There was no more appropriate place for Jesus to reveal himself than Jerusalem, and with so many gathered for the Passover, the time was right also. The rulers had to be given the first opportunity of accepting their Messiah. But HOW would he appear? Malachi had warned that the “messenger of the covenant” would suddenly and unexpectedly come to his Temple, and as a refiner’s fire and fuller’s soap, so would he remove corruption (Mal. 3:1-3).

In due course the “Lord whom they sought came to his temple”, and what did he behold? The court reserved for Gentiles had been encroached upon and was now occupied with stalls of animals and tables of money changers! It was reasonable that those from distant lands should be able to purchase in a convenient place animals for sacrifice, and it was also important that they should be able to exchange their currencies in order to purchase. But what had begun in innocence, had in time become corrupt — the Gentiles could no longer worship God in the place allocated to them, and the sacrificial animals could only be bought with Temple currency, which was obtained at exorbitant rates yielding immense profits to the priests! Thus worshippers were shamelessly exploited and the Temple service was accomplished only with hardship.

The Lord saw it all; amidst the noisy bleating and lowing of animals and the clatter of money being exchanged by those with an “evil eye” for profit, it was almost impossible to “worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 96:9). The indignation of the Lord burned and he did not spare. Twisting some cords into a whip, he drove them all out of the Temple, the sheep and the oxen; he flung tables aside, scattering the piles of money, while men cringed in fear before him. Turning to those who remained, those who sold doves, he gave command, “Take

these things hence: make not my Father's house an house of merchandise".

Slowly the storm subsided. No man opposed him. Those responsible for the desecration came forward, but their attack was frustrated before it could begin by the silent figure standing before them, his eyes blazing with anger and challenge. It seems that they felt guilty — perhaps he was Messiah, for John the Baptist had told them he would come. They asked him "to show" them a sign to justify what he had done (cp. Deut. 13:1-2).

Jesus gave them a sign. "Destroy this temple (Gk "naos") and in three days I will raise it up again". This was no empty challenge but a prophecy. Jesus was predicting his own death at their hands and also his resurrection in three days. He would not literally raise himself from death, but in his "obedience unto death" he would secure the favour of His Father who would raise him (Jn. 10:17-18; Phil. 2:8-11). His words of condemnation and the opposition to the rulers in Jerusalem were the initial steps in the path that would culminate in their putting him to the stake, and Jesus' words show that he perceived this. Not only so, but this wicked persecution of God's own Son would be the sin which would lead to the calamities of A.D. 70 when the Temple, the city, and the land would be lost amid indescribable horrors.

The Temple would ultimately be replaced by a new, eternal sanctuary, the chief corner-stone of which was the Son of God: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a sure foundation" (Isa. 28:16). It is notable that when Jesus referred to the temple of his body, he used a word (Gk. "naos") which describes the inner sacred part where God dwelt, the Most Holy, whereas he spoke of the Temple as merely the "house" or "abode" (Gk. "oikon"). God had departed from the one and was now dwelling or "tabernacling" in another, the body of His Son (Jn. 1:14).

Jesus' statement in verse 20 was not forgotten by the Jews or the disciples. After 3 years it was misquoted by the Jews in an effort to condemn him, and thus the truth of the words themselves was unwittingly established. They were the ones who would destroy him! (Matt. 26:61). The disciples remembered them to better purpose: when despair had given place to joy at the sight of their risen Lord, the disciples "remembered he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture and the word which Jesus had said" (v.22). For them, Jesus' statement became a sign of his authority and Messiahship.

The purging of the Temple was followed by works of power (v.23). Here was ample evidence of his authority for those who had eyes to see. Many did believe when they saw these works, but it was only a superficial acknowledgement of his power. Israel had seen the miraculous plagues upon Egypt, but had proved faithless soon afterwards in the wilderness (Ps. 95:8-11). Jesus, who knew all men, "did

not trust himself to them” (v. 24 RSV). He knew their allegiance had its source in wonder, not in belief, and he acted towards them accordingly.

### **NICODEMUS COMES TO JESUS (Jn. 3:1-21).**

While Jesus knew that the acclaim of the people at large would soon turn into murderous hate, he was none the less discriminating. He was able to search the hearts of men, so when Nicodemus came to him he perceived in this man not only his weaknesses but the possibilities of strong faith. In Rotherham’s translation Nicodemus is contrasted with his hearers as a whole for John 3:1 reads: “There was **HOWEVER** a man from among the Pharisees . . .” Jesus’ assessment of Nicodemus was right, for as time went by we find his faith emerging in strength and, despite the difficulties of his position as ruler in Israel, he takes a bold stand with the Lord in:

1. Protesting against the illegal methods of the Sanhedrin when they sought to condemn Jesus (7:51); and
2. In joining with Joseph of Arimathaea to give the Lord an honorable burial (19:39).

He spoke as a representative of the Pharisees: “Rabbi, WE know that thou art a teacher . . .” (v.2) and the description given of him is “a man of (out of) the Pharisees” (v.1). Perhaps he represented some of the more thoughtful among the rulers in his enquiry about Jesus’ mission, in a similar way to a delegation that had been sent to John (1:19). His interview was “by night” and it seems that he sought to avoid open association with Jesus — his faith was yet insufficient to permit him to damage his standing. When Jesus later said that men “love darkness rather than light”, it seems that he was alluding to Nicodemus’ furtive approach by night (v.19).

Nicodemus said, “We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (v.2). Jesus replied, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (v.3). Nicodemus’ bewilderment is seen in his question. “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (v.4).

Jesus enlarged upon his words: “Except a man be born of water and of Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (vv.5-6). That Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand his words, is evident from his reproof in verses 10 and 12.

Jesus spoke of three births — of flesh (at childbirth), of water, and of Spirit. Birth of water (i.e. baptism) is essential for salvation (v. 3; Mk. 16:16; Gal. 3:27-29). Without the humility, repentance and belief that it symbolises, entrance into the Kingdom of God is not possible. Baptism is often likened to a rebirth (Titus 3:5 Roth; 1 Pet. 1:23;

2:1-2), for in it the believer acknowledges that his fleshly heritage is of no use to him so far as eternal life is concerned, and that he is a newborn babe, a son of God dependant on the Word of God.

But there is no change of nature or physical state at baptism. This only comes when "this mortal puts on immortality" after the resurrection and becomes spirit nature. This is what Jesus termed as being "born of the Spirit". The Apostle Paul amplified this in saying, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God: neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:50).

Jesus went on to explain, "He which is born of the spirit" is like the wind, able to move from one point to another being heard but undetected (vv.7-8; cp. the angels in Ps. 104:4 Roth; 2 Sam. 5:24). Following his "birth of Spirit" or resurrection, Jesus possessed a body of "flesh and bones", able to be seen and felt but which could travel unseen (Lk. 24:39, 40; Jn. 20:19).

Nicodemus again was perplexed and the Lord, like Malachi, reprov- ed him (vv.9-10; Mal. 2:7). He contrasts Nicodemus' ignorance with their knowledge (the "we" of v.11 would include John Baptist) and condemns Nicodemus as a representative of the Jews for rejecting the witness or testimony of Jesus and John.

The Lord then spoke of what their rejection would lead to, namely his crucifixion: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (v.14). There was a previous occasion when the Law and its priesthood had proved incapable of providing redemption and that was in the Wilderness when Israel had sinned and "fiery serpents" were sent among the people (Num. 21:4-9). The specific national sacrifice for sin was by-passed along with the priesthood, and another way was provided by God. Those bitten by a serpent could find deliverance by looking in faith to the raised impaled serpent made of brass in which the sting of sin was not to be found. Belief in its efficacy brought salvation to "everyone" and not merely to stricken Israelites (Num. 21:8, 9).

These were the spiritual lessons, the "heavenly things", that Jesus was teaching Nicodemus for Jesus too would be impaled on a stake and lifted up. Notice how the Lord emphasised that the salvation that would come through him would be available to both Jew and Gentile. It would not come through the Law, but through the "door of faith." (The terms "world" and "whosoever" in vv.15-16 are all-embracing that is, the Gentiles as well as the Jews; cp. Rom. 10:11-13). It was to Nicodemus' credit that he ultimately did accept Jesus and was not among those who crucified the Lord. He saw fulfilled the very words he heard earlier and so his faith grew and emboldened him to take his stand with Joseph of Arimathaea.

Jesus concluded by emphasising God's love in providing His Son. Though Jesus would be taken by wicked hands and slain, his death was required by the appointment of God, that He might be shown to be just while justifying those who would come to Him through His Son.

But while God in love sent His Son to save men, the inevitable result would see many “fall”. Failure to believe must mean condemnation; the presence of the Son of God would force a decision upon men! Jesus so plainly revealed the Father, that he was as a light amongst darkness (v.19; 1:8-9). The extent of mens’ accountability or responsibility was increased for they could no longer claim ignorance as a cloak for sin (cp. 15:22; Acts 17:30-31). The tragic effect of the light upon men in general is to confirm them in darkness: because of evil habits they fear exposure by the light and so refuse to be enlightened and saved (v.20). On the other hand, the few that seek the truth come gladly to God (v.21).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus did not tolerate corruption of worship, and today he will have us worship God “in the beauty of holiness”.
- Jesus understood human nature perfectly, and as he is our judge, we must strive to purify our thoughts, words and deeds.
- Though Nicodemus was mystified by Jesus’ words, he was not discouraged. At length he was prepared to take his stand at the foot of the cross. So too must our faith and courage for Christ grow.
- God’s love is supremely expressed in the gift of His Son and He would have men respond in belief and be saved rather than be condemned.
- The presence of “light” (or knowledge of God) makes men responsible to God.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 3, Chapters 1, 2  
“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Pages 42-63  
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 12 and 13

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Why did Jesus cleanse the Temple when he came to Jerusalem at the beginning of his public ministry?*
2. *What “sign” did Jesus give after he cleansed the Temple at the beginning of his ministry? Who later remembered what he said about this sign?*
3. *Explain the following statement which was made by Jesus to Nicodemus: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God”.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Malachi the prophet said: "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple". Write an essay on this comment as far as it relates to the ministry of Christ.*
2. *Write an essay on the conversation that took place when Nicodemus came to Jesus by night.*
3. *What did Jesus say to Nicodemus about him being "lifted up"? Mention in your answer the relevant event in the Wilderness Wanderings and also the lessons this incident and Jesus' words have for us.*



## **4. DRAMATICALLY ACCEPTED AT SAMARIA**

**“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst”**

*After Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus he went into Judea where he baptised many. At the same time John the Baptist was baptising at Aenon. The fact that both were baptising provoked a question in the minds of John’s disciples. What authority had Jesus to baptise? In answer, John detracted from himself and testified to the origin and authority of Jesus and hence the need for his disciples to transfer their allegiance to him. “He must increase but I must decrease”, John said, and therefore it is significant that in John 4:1 we are told that Jesus “baptised MORE disciples than John”. When the Lord then moved through Samaria “many of the Samaritans of that city believed”. Thus John 4 illustrates how the gospel broke new ground and yielded a spiritual harvest in a semi-Gentile community.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see how Jesus is the provider of the water of life to both Jew and Gentile, and to see the requirements of true worship.*

### **John 4:1-42**

#### **TRAVELLING NORTH THROUGH SAMARIA (Jn. 4:1-6).**

News reached the authorities that large numbers were now flocking to Jesus as they had previously to John. Their attitude made further preaching undesirable for they were jealous of his influence and liable to take him (v.1). So he left Judea and moved north. There were two routes leading to Galilee. One was through Samaria, but was undertaken by Jews only in companies because of danger. The other route east of Jordan was probably the easier, but for Jesus it involved danger from the authorities and so he chose Samaria: “he must needs go through Samaria”. He came to Sychar, one of the cities of the Samaritans, which was near Shechem, where God gave the first promise in the land to Abraham, and also near to the portion of land which Jacob gave to the sons of Joseph (Gen. 12:6-7; 48:22). They arrived at Jacob’s well at noon (the sixth hour) and Jesus sank down wearily, being exhausted, while his disciples bought food in the city.

#### **THE MYSTERY OF THE LIVING WATER (Jn. 4:7-15).**

Though tired, Jesus was prepared to forget his needs for the needs of others. He spoke to a Samaritan woman who came to seek water at the well, and gradually brought her to the realisation that he could offer her the living water of eternal life.

There was good reason why Jesus could have ignored the woman: not only was he weary, but the Jews were prejudiced against the mixed Samaritan race, and he knew she was immoral. However, he said,

“Give me to drink”. It was a calculated question for Jesus knew what her reaction would be and how he in turn would reply. She expressed surprise that he should deign to speak to her, a Samaritan. Would he compromise his stand for the sake of water (v.9)! But Jesus was unconcerned with a tradition which was meaningless and based upon hatred and passion. He did not dwell on her reply but gently challenged her with her identity. She knew he was a Jew, but not who! He replied: “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water” (cp. Jn. 3:16). Wells were often called “gifts of God”, and “living water” was the usual description of the running, bubbling water of a spring. That is why the woman took Jesus’ words in the natural sense, but he had intended her to see in them a spiritual meaning. She did not realise that in spiritual things she was the tired and a thirsty soul at the well of life. She claimed he was unable to provide living water because he did not possess the means of drawing water, and then she rebuked him for presuming to be greater than Jacob, who gave them the well to provide for children and cattle. Here was a challenging comparison.

How did Jesus answer? There was no scorn but a keeping of the major issues to the forefront. He persisted in the contrast between the water he could offer and that which he had asked of her. The well’s water would lead to renewed thirst; but the “living water” (i.e. the Word of which God is the “fountain”—Jer. 2:13; Isa. 12:3; 49:10; 55:1-3), which he could give would become a perennial fountain providing life eternal (vv.13-14). Thus indirectly he answered the comparison of himself with Jacob.

Without fully grasping his meaning, she requested “living water” to save her future visits to the well. The next stage had now been reached. The conversation had turned around. Instead of him making the request of her, she was now seeking his water! Jesus must now provide her with grounds for belief.

### **JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF AND THE WOMAN BELIEVES (Jn. 4:16-30).**

The woman asked for living water but Jesus replied, “Go call thy husband, and come hither”. Why did he say this, for it seems to have no relevance to her request? First of all the request to fetch her husband was reasonable, for if the gift was going to be bestowed then it should be shared. But more importantly, Jesus was giving her grounds for belief in him as Messiah by making a statement which he knew would give him the opportunity of revealing her past life history. This would become a sure sign that he was a prophet, and therefore that she ought to give heed to what he called “living water”. “Go call thy HUSBAND . . .”

She was quick to reply, “I have no husband”. Jesus revealed a

detailed knowledge of her past which could only have come from God: "Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband". Jesus' words were not only accurate and "of God", but penetrated her heart: they were also designed to bring to light her sins and her needs.

She perceived that he was a prophet. For a moment she paused embarrassed and, avoiding his command, asked the disputed question about where God could be acceptably worshipped—Jerusalem or Samaria. The Jews regarded Jerusalem as "the place where men ought to worship", but in the days of Nehemiah, Sanballat built a rival temple on Mt. Gerizim near Shechem, where the Samaritans worshipped.

Jesus' answer in verses 21-24 is a model. He goes right over the question of petty loyalties and comes back to the big question of one's own personal relationship to God. Jesus always kept things in their proper perspective, and we do well to follow his example. He spoke in a kindly way. "Woman believe me" (she now had ample reason to believe), "the hour cometh" (A.D. 33 and finally A.D. 70 when Jerusalem and the Temple were desecrated) "when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father" (v.21). Jesus indicated that he was "the saviour of the WORLD" (v.42), for later there would be the "times of the Gentiles" when Gentiles would also be called (Lk. 21:24). In Acts 10 we read of Peter being DIVINELY sent to the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, when for the first time, "one of another nation" was formally baptised into the name of Jesus Christ. Thus God can be worshipped acceptably in any place. Jerusalem though still has an important place in divine worship for it will be the centre of worship in the age to come (Mk. 11:15-17; Zech. 14:16).

Jesus next made a comparison between the religion of the Samaritans and the Jews: the Samaritans "knew not what they worshipped". They were a mixed race of people and their worship was a confusion of idolatry and the fear of "the God of the land" (2 Kgs. 17:24-41). They held only parts of the Pentateuch as inspired, whereas the Jews held the Old Testament uncorrupted. Jesus said that "salvation was of the Jews".

Jesus then proceeded to define the sort of worshippers that were acceptable with God (vv.23-24). He pointed out that unlike the idols, God is a Spirit, or an intellectual Being, Who perceives, knows, feels and expects men who are created in "His image and likeness" to comprehend His purpose and love, and respond in devotion and service. God has given men the record of His way and purpose and would have them appreciate Him and "worship in spirit (or sincerity) and in truth". It is notable that Jesus quoted the words of Joshua spoken in the same area (Josh. 24:14). In that chapter Joshua had just drawn Israel's attention to all the wonderful acts of God toward them and then he called upon them to serve God "in sincerity and in truth". All

Israel had not done this for Joshua then called upon the people to choose between the service of idols or Yahweh. Jesus (of whom Joshua was a type) was making the same call.

The woman knew enough about the Old Testament to associate this enlarged concept with Messiah (v.25; cp. “he will tell us all things” with Deut. 18:18). The time had now come for the Lord to reveal his identity. He put aside the reserve he had exercised among the Jews and informed her that he was in fact the Messiah. In reviewing his discourse, we should notice how gently and considerately he led her from unbelief to conviction.

At that point the disciples arrived and interrupted the conversation. Unlike their Lord they could not justify speaking to the Samaritan woman, though they did not say so. The woman went away so much lost in the wonder of belief that she even forgot her mission — she left the waterpot! As soon as she reached the city she burst forth with her new faith, “Come and see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” The believing Samaritans began to pour forth AND JESUS SAW THEM.

#### **TRUE MEAT: DOING GOD’S WILL (Jn. 4:31-42).**

The disciples pressed the Lord to take food but were unsuccessful. The joy of service and the satisfaction attending the response of the woman, had taken the place of food for the moment. He was scarcely conscious of their movement about him. When Jesus told them he had meat to eat that they knew not of, they surmised that he had received it from another source. Then he explained that HIS MEAT was to do the will of Him that sent him (cp. Ps. 40:7-8).

It was four months before harvest but Jesus said that the fields were now quite white and waiting to be reaped! What did he mean? His eyes were uplifted and he could see men streaming out of the village coming to learn about him because of the woman’s words (cp. Isa. 49:18). The disciples had a great work to do: they had to reap the harvest of men for God. Jesus had sown the Word. They must enter into labours already commenced and finish the work. The result was that many Samaritans believed on account of the woman’s report, and others quite independently believed when they heard him themselves in the two days he abode with them (vv. 39-42).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus alone can provide the living water of eternal life.
- True worship today does not depend on place, but upon our attitude to God.
- God has made man after His likeness and is worshipped acceptably when men comprehend Him and respond from the heart in truth and sincerity.
- True meat is doing the will of the Father, labouring for Him in the harvest of men.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

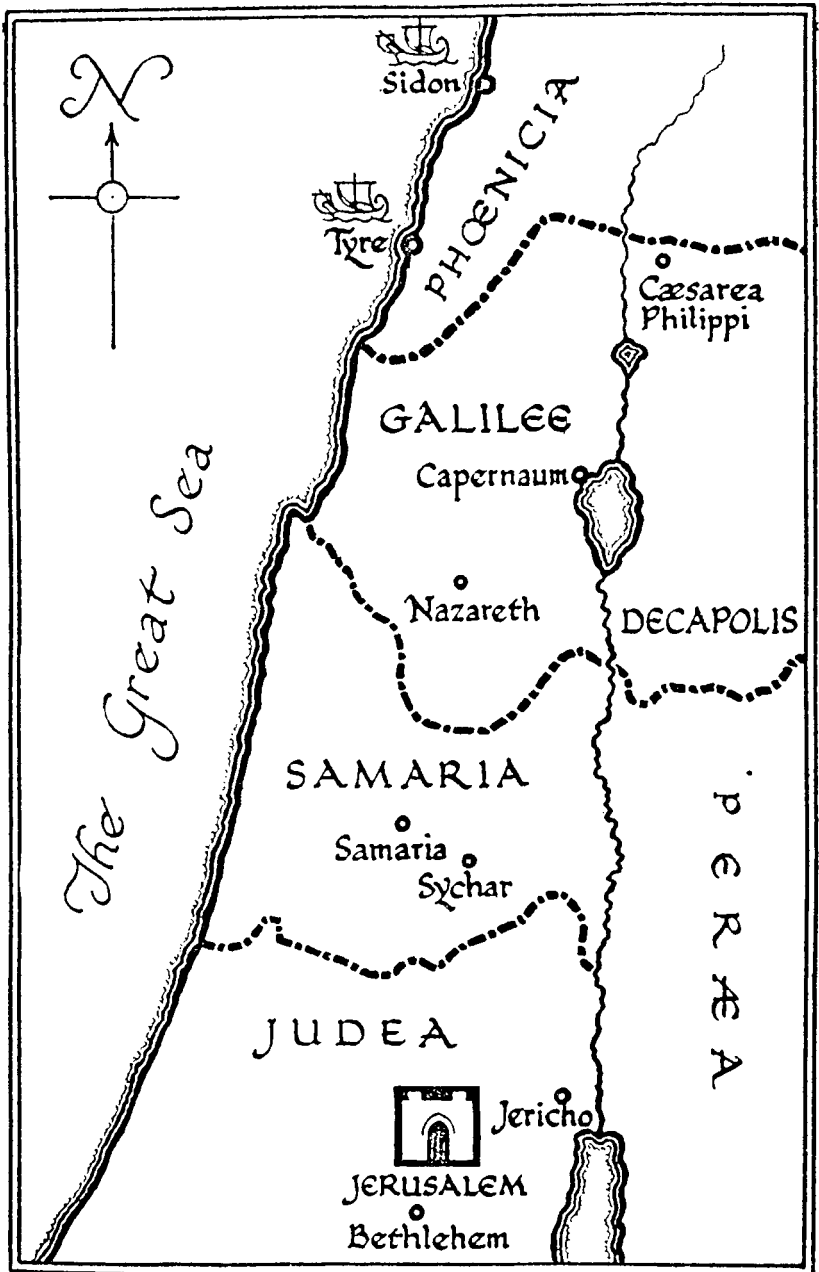
- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 76-80  
“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Chapter 4  
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 14

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Who were the Samaritans and what did they believe? What did Jesus tell the Samaritan woman about true worship?*
2. *Describe how Jesus showed to the woman of Samaria that he was a prophet.*
3. *What lessons do we learn about true worship from the incident involving the Samaritan woman?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Recount the events that took place when Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well.*
2. *Outline the steps by which the woman of Samaria was brought to acknowledge Jesus as Messiah.*
3. *What lessons did the disciples have to learn from the meeting of the Samaritan woman? How did Jesus teach these to them?*



THE PROVINCES OF PALESTINE

## Section 2

# LESSONS IN DISCIPLESHIP

The apostle Paul says that Jesus will “bring many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10). Later he quotes from Psalm 22:22 in which Christ says: “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the ecclesia will I sing praise unto thee”. The work of the Lord was to call men and women out of the world to be his brethren, his disciples.

As the Lord’s ministry progressed and he went about “teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of sickness” he was followed by “great multitudes of people” (Matt. 4:23-25). Amongst these were those who were genuinely impressed by “the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” and sought to gain instruction. They became his disciples. From this group, Jesus chose the twelve who would accompany him throughout his ministry and who would, after his resurrection, be sent forth as his apostles.

Disciples (literally ‘learners’) need to be taught, if their name is to mean anything. To expand his teaching, Jesus took them unto one of the hills of the Land and “when he sat down, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them” (Matt. 5:1-2 R.S.V.). In a remarkable way, there the Lord outlined the qualities of true discipleship in what we now know as the discourse or Sermon on the Mount.

## 5. JESUS CALLS HIS DISCIPLES

**“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself . . .”**

*The disciples of Jesus were not selected all at once, but in ones and twos. The first of them were disciples of John the Baptist, who directed them to Jesus. As the disciples continued with Jesus their knowledge of God’s Word greatly increased, and they learned from him that true discipleship requires that a man should put God first in his life. As time progressed, it was necessary to select from among the disciples twelve men who would be especially charged with the responsibility of preaching and upholding the truth. These men were called Apostles.*

*The aim of this lesson is to see the full response which men must give to the Son of God.*

### **John 1:29-51; Luke 5:1-11, 27-28; 6:12-16**

#### **“THE LAMB OF GOD” (Jn. 1:29-30).**

It was the day after John the Baptist met a deputation from the Sanhedrin that he saw Jesus coming towards him, and proclaimed him to the assembled throng as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”. This amounted to a declaration that he was the one through whom men would be reconciled to God. In Eden, Adam was told fig leaves could not cover his sin — only coats of skins (from a Divinely provided slain lamb) would do this (Gen. 3:7, 21). Lambs were also slain to deliver Israel’s firstborn when those of Egypt were destroyed (Exod. 12:12, 13), while lambs were offered every morning and every evening as daily burnt offerings (Num. 28:3, 4). These lambs showed to Jews the role of Messiah, but the work of Jesus was to evoke a wider response, for he was the Lamb of God to take away “the sins OF THE WORLD”.

#### **THE FIRST DISCIPLES (Jn. 1:35-42).**

Another day passed and John the Baptist was standing with two of his disciples—Andrew (Simon Peter’s brother) and probably John, the writer of the Gospel record (cp. Jn. 13:23, 19:26). Seeing Jesus as he walked, the Baptist pointed him out to his disciples, saying once more, “Behold the Lamb of God”, and immediately Andrew and John detached themselves from him and followed Jesus.

These disciples were not then aware of the tragedy that would befall Jesus (cp. Lk. 18:34). It was sufficient for them that John had spoken of Israel’s Messiah, the Son of God, and he was now pointed out to them. They would therefore follow him.

Jesus turned and questioned them of their purpose and they sought an interview to discuss with him more closely the nature of his calling:



“Master”, they said, “where dwellest thou”. He replied, “Come and see” and that afternoon — it was the “10th hour”, about 4 p.m. — they talked with the Lord and stayed with him all night. One can imagine how their hearts would have stirred as Jesus taught them.

Greatly stimulated by his discussion with the Lord, Andrew found Simon his brother and exclaimed, “We have found the Messiah!” They would have often discussed together the coming of Israel’s Messiah, so Simon did not hesitate to come with Andrew. He was at once made aware he was in the presence of the Lord for, without any formal introductions, Jesus told Simon he knew him already: “Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas”, he said. “Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone”. The experiences of life, in service to his Master, would make their mark on Simon. His name, like his character, would change. He would become Cephas, or Peter. His eager, impetuous disposition would eventually be replaced by the rock-like stability so necessary to maintaining truth (Matt. 16:16-18).

### **THE CALL OF PHILIP AND NATHANAEL (Jn. 1:43-51).**

The following day Jesus determined to leave Judaea and go into Galilee some 80 or 90 kilometres to the north. Andrew, John and Simon, like himself, were all of Galilee. They had come to hear the preaching of the Baptist, who had truly led them to Christ, and whose work with them was thus fulfilled. It was natural that they should return with him to Galilee.

On the way there, Jesus paused to gain another disciple. The circumstances of this calling are not disclosed: simply that Jesus said to Philip, “Follow me”. Possibly he was pointed out by Andrew and Simon Peter for they were all of Bethsaida (Fish-town). They were experiencing a wave of enthusiasm. Philip hurried to find his friend Nathanael, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”.

But Nathanael enquired further. Nazareth he knew as part of despised Galilee (cp. 1 Kgs. 9:12, 13). Messiah was to come from Bethlehem, so he asked, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” “Come and see”, said Philip.

Jesus knew the hearts of all men. As Nathanael came nearer, he heard Jesus say: “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”. Nathanael was one of those sincere, artless people who are unmoved by what appears to them flattery, or mere cleverness. So he replied: “Whence knowest thou me”, and was told, “Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee”.

Nathanael was staggered. His doubts immediately dissolved. This was a demonstration of power that revealed the hand of God. Here was no “son of Joseph”, so He exclaimed: “Master, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel”.

He could see in this one before him the fulfilment of the law and the

prophets — successor to David and Israel's promised King (cp. Ps. 2:2, 7; 2 Sam. 7:14; Isa. 9:6-7).

But Jesus pressed the point further. He added: "Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (cp. Gen. 28:12).

It seems likely Nathanael had been reading under the fig tree the portion of scripture which Jesus alluded to, namely, Genesis 28. Jacob had departed from his parents and was to survive in Padan-aram with his uncle Laban by means of his guile. Later he was taught to depend on God and this was signified when his name was changed from Jacob ("heel catcher") to Israel ("prince with God"). Jesus' reference to Nathanael as "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile" has overtones of the life of Jacob in it. If in fact Nathanael's mind was immersed in this portion of scripture, imagine the impact made upon him! The one before him knew not only where he was but also his thoughts. No wonder he acclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God and the King of Israel (v.49).

#### **THE ESSENCE OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP (Lk. 5:1-11, 27, 28).**

As Jesus went forward, his words and his works attracted men to him. Slowly but surely the band of disciples grew, as for instance when Matthew left his tax-booth at Capernaum. Jesus said to him, "Follow me! And he left all, and rose up and followed him".

There was a finality to this decision that was lacking in the response of the first disciples, for when they returned to Galilee with Jesus, only a few remained at his side, the others returning to their occupations while Jesus continued to preach and perform miracles. They had to be brought to see that discipleship in Christ involves putting God first and foremost in life. The record in Luke 5 fills out Matt. 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20.

Simon, Andrew, James and John were working close to the lake-shore, within hearing of Jesus. They had fished all night, but had caught nothing. And now, at the beginning of a new day, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, the boats were moored by the lake-side, and the four fishermen were occupied in washing and mending their nets.

The crowd grew and became so great that Jesus entered Simon's boat and requested it remove a little from the shore, so that he might teach the people from the ship. When he had finished speaking, he asked Simon to go out into the deep and let down his net for a haul of fish. Out of respect for Jesus, Simon agreed. They had toiled all night for nothing and it seemed futile to do anything further: all his experience in fishing argued against it: "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net".

The result was miraculous. A great number of fish was netted, so

many that another ship had to be called and it also was filled — the net broke and the ships were in danger of sinking. The disciples were astonished. Simon Peter was overcome with a sense of unworthiness, but Jesus said, “Fear not, from henceforth thou shalt catch MEN”. Having brought their ships to shore, they then “forsook all and followed him”.

The lesson they were taught deeply impressed them. Nor should it be lost upon us. It is so easy to think God is well pleased with us as we do our daily work, when, all the time, we stand idle in the gospel field. Quite often, even our best efforts in daily work fail because God is left out of account. Like the disciples, we need to remember that God is more interested in our “catching” men than fish. He will use us in this purpose if we (like the disciples) centre our lives in the Word, not in the World.

### **THE TWELVE (Lk. 6:12-13).**

The numbers of men and women who attached themselves to Jesus grew rapidly as he preached the gospel of the Kingdom and did miracles. As time went by it became necessary, in order to preserve his work, to devote much attention to twelve of them — one for each of the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). They would be **taught** by him — be his “disciples” — that in turn they might be **sent** by him to instruct others — be his “apostles”.

It was not an easy task to make the selection and because of its importance Jesus went out into a mountain “and continued all night in prayer to God”. In the morning he made the choice.

Of many we know little. We do know however that, Judas excepted, they were faithful to the responsibility placed in them. They showed human weakness and failed at times to carry out their Master’s instructions, but learnt from their mistakes. They were not highly educated, nor were they chosen for their ability to speak, but because of their character (Acts 4:13).

#### **The “Twelve” were:**

1. **SIMON PETER** — also called Cephas, a stone (from the Aramaic for Peter Jn. 1:42). He was the son of Jonas (“Bar-jona” in Matt. 16:17), a fisherman of Bethsaida (Matt. 4:18; Jn. 1:44). He was originally a disciple of John the Baptist and was married (Mk. 1:30; 1 Cor. 9:5). He wrote 2 epistles and influenced Mark in writing his Gospel.
2. **ANDREW**—Peter’s brother who had been a disciple of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:35, 40). He introduced Greeks to Jesus (Jn. 12:20-23).
3. **JOHN** — also a fisherman, a son of Zebedee, of Bethsaida (Matt. 4:21; Lk. 5:10). With James his brother, he was called Boanerges — “son of thunder” (Mk. 3:17). He was probably the cousin of

- Jesus, and the one whom Jesus loved. He wrote a Gospel, three Epistles and the Revelation.
4. **JAMES** — John's brother (Mk. 1:19). Their mother was probably Salome, sister of Mary (cp. Matt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40; 16:1; Jn. 19:25).
  5. **PHILIP** — also of Bethsaida in Galilee (Jn. 1:44).
  6. **BARTHOLOMEW** — means son of Tolmai. He was from Cana of Galilee and is thought by many to be Nathanael. He is mentioned only twice (Jn. 1:45; 21:2).
  7. **MATTHEW** — also called Levi (Matt. 9:9; Lk. 5:27). He was son of Alphaeus. He was a publican or tax gatherer in Galilee and wrote the first Gospel.
  8. **THOMAS** — called also Didymus, meaning "a twin" (Jn. 11:16). He initially doubted that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but became convicted when the Lord appeared before him (Jn. 20:24-29).
  9. **JAMES** — son of Alphaeus (Matt. 10:3), possibly "James the Little" or "Less" (Matt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40; 16:1; Lk. 24:10).
  10. **LEBBAEUS THADDAEUS** — also called Judas, but not Iscariot (Lk. 6:16; Jn. 14:22). He is thought by some to be brother of James, "the Lord's brother" (Jude 1; Lk. 6:16; Gal. 1:19).
  11. **SIMON ZELOTES** — a member of the political party called the Zealots (Lk. 6:15). The term Canaanite applied to him should be Canaanite from Kanan, the Aramaic for Greek "Zealotes" (Matt. 10:4).
  12. **JUDAS ISCARIOT** — son of Simon Iscariot (Jn. 6:71 RV). Iscariot is "ish Kerioth", i.e. man of Kerioth in the south of Judah (Josh. 15:25). He betrayed Jesus, and was later replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:23-26).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus was proclaimed by John as "the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world".
- Jesus, by his demeanor and actions, was clearly recognised by his early disciples as not only the Messiah, but also as the Son of God.
- The miracle of the fishes taught the disciples the necessity for total commitment, and "they left all and followed him".
- Jesus drew to himself a select band of men he knew would have to carry on the work after his death. With but one exception, these men were faithful to their calling, leaving an example to all disciples down through the ages.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 61-65, 95-98  
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapters 12, 16, 22  
“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Pages 28-29  
“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, Pages 90-94, 117-120, 143-145

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How did John the Baptist point out Jesus to his disciples? What do the words that he used teach us of Jesus?*
2. *Describe the calling of Nathanael.*
3. *After their initial calling, some of Jesus’ disciples went back to their original occupations. How did Jesus show them that they must have total commitment in their work for God?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the way in which the work of John the Baptist prepared the men who would follow Jesus.*
2. *Name the twelve apostles, and describe some of the notable features and characteristics of these men.*
3. *Summarise the calling of the disciples and selection of the twelve apostles.*

## 6. JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES

### (a) The Beatitudes—Portrait of a Saint

“He opened his mouth and taught them”

*After the wilderness temptation, Jesus returned into Galilee “in the power of the Spirit . . . and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about” (Luke 4:14). Matthew’s fourth chapter (vv. 12-25) records an extensive work of preaching in Galilee, where his teaching and miracles of healing attracted “great multitudes” from areas in the north of Galilee and Decapolis, and from as far away as Jerusalem, Judea and beyond Jordan. When Jesus saw these multitudes he ascended a mountain and there outlined the moral qualities of those he would approve worthy of his kingdom.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see the character which we should try to develop.*

### Matthew 5:1-12

#### ONE FAR GREATER THAN MOSES.

Jesus and Moses both ascended mountains and delivered God’s Laws to His people. But Jesus was the greater. Whereas Moses was a Mediator who “received the law by the disposition of angels” (Gal. 3:19; Acts 7:38, 53), God’s communication through Jesus was direct. Jesus “opened his mouth” and God’s words came forth (Heb. 1:1-2; Deut. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-23). Again, whereas Moses’ law listed blessings for the obedient and cursings for the disobedient (Deut. 28), Jesus spoke of blessings only. Some have attributed this to his mildness, but the opposite is true. Whereas the disobedient lived under curse in the Mosaic Constitution, this class will be eliminated by Christ. They are not contemplated. They will be banished at the commencement of his reign (Matt. 7:23).

#### THE BEATITUDES.

The personality Jesus describes in the Beatitudes (the “blessings” of Matt. 5:3-11) is essentially his own, but others are envisaged, for he speaks of “theirs”, “they” and “ye”. The characteristics are not meant to be shown one by one in **different** individuals, but depict a **single personality**.

Moreover, the Sermon bears no relationship to those outside the Hope of Israel. It portrays the moral qualities of a people **ALREADY IN** covenant relationship with God.

But if, in the Beatitudes, Jesus describes the different facets of his own character complete in God, he also describes the **DEVELOPMENT** of that character, and from that, the development of any character that would seek to be patterned on his.

In each one of the eight Beatitudes, the person of whom he speaks is pronounced “blessed” — or happy — not only because of the prospect set before him, but also because of the continuing tranquility of mind of those who know and do their Lord’s will (cp. Jn. 13:17). Again, in the first and last Beatitudes, it is said of those blessed that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. This does not mean that they are already in the Kingdom. The present possessive tense is used because the people of God are bound by the covenant to the Kingdom. This class cannot fail to attain it. The Kingdom is said to be “of heaven” because it will be the Kingdom of Him who is enthroned in heaven, and will be governed by His principles.

The eight Beatitudes are as follows:—

1. **Blessed are the Poor in Spirit—Matt. 5:3 cp. Isa. 66:2.** The first essential is poverty of spirit. Such a mind has renounced all that the flesh finds attractive. A choice has to be made to begin with. One cannot travel two roads going in opposite directions. One cannot begin to accept the gifts of God until prepared to give up the prizes the world has to offer. One must renounce human wisdom, and “tremble at the Word”. But at the end of such “poverty”, or renunciation of the world and its ways, there are great riches — an eternal abiding place in God’s Kingdom.
2. **Blessed are They That Mourn—Matt. 5:4; cp. Isa. 61:3.** This is the natural outcome of a renounced spirit. In those who have bid “good-bye” to what the world offers to the senses, temporal ambition has been resolved. Such people are linked with the Truth. They view the world from God’s position, and they lament a society that either has no interest in, or actively opposes the things of Zion. Christ’s words are drawn from Isaiah 61:3, where those who mourn are said to “mourn in Zion”. They mourn the absence of their Lord (Matt. 9:15), and await “the times of refreshing” referred to in Acts 3:19-21.
3. **Blessed are The Meek—Matt. 5:5; cp. Psa. 25:9-14; 37:11.** Such are **teachable** — mouldable in the hand of the Potter. “The meek will he guide in judgment: the meek will he teach his way”. To the world they are weak and tasteless, but in fact this quality is only to be found in the strongest characters (e.g. Moses—Num. 12:3) and is the hard-earned reward of a purging experience for which courage and self-control are required. They have no confidence in the flesh, but rejoice in the Word and emulate its precepts (Phil. 3:3).
4. **Blessed are They which do Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness—Matt. 5:6; cp. Isa. 55:1.** Finding life by letting it go is an emptying process. It empties the disciple of the ingredients that give satisfaction to the carnal mind. But life cannot remain empty. A man who is satisfied by the world has no interest in spiritual food. The poor in spirit, meek, etc., are blessed for qualities already possessed, but Christ does not bless “the righteous”. Rather he has in mind those who have an unsatisfied longing for righteousness — a longing for the days when God’s

righteousness will be seen in the earth and, furthermore, a desire that, even now, our character and conduct might express God's justice. Peter said: "As new born babes desire (or long for) the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). It is in the Word we receive satisfaction of our hunger after righteousness. "I am the bread of life" said Jesus, "He that cometh unto me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35; 7:37-38).

5. **Blessed are the Merciful—Matt. 5:7; cp. Psa. 18:25.** Righteousness represents the sterner element in the ideal character. Rigorous self-discipline can produce a harsh attitude to the failings of others. "Severity" must be balanced with "Goodness" as it is in Yahweh himself (Rom. 11:22; cp. Ex. 34:6-7). Nothing is more inspiring than righteousness matured by sympathy and mercy, "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (Jas. 2:13).

Whence comes the motive for mercy? The "love of God", once we really come to know its generosity and its outflowing character, creates within us a responsive love — a desire to do something for Him who has done so much for us (cp. Lk. 11:42; 2 Cor. 5:14; Matt. 23:23). Love of God finds expression in love of brethren. We cannot give like God, but we can and must learn to forgive like Him, and be merciful. This quality is found in those obedient to the second great commandment (Matt. 22:39; cp. Jas. 2:8-13).

6. **Blessed are the Pure in Heart—Matt. 5:8; cp. Psa. 24:4-5; 18:26.** The character is not yet complete. Attention is now turned from the circumference to the heart. Unless our heart is pure, our lives cannot be, however much actions and words might seem to suggest it is (Tit. 1:15). "Pure" means "unmixed". Gold is only pure when there are no alloys present. Jesus does not have in mind the exclusion of one form of grossness, but all such forms. The heart is not pure if one's own private interests are mixed up with God's.

But naturally, the "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). How then can it be purified? By the developmental steps of the Beatitudes and by a sincere concentration on Him who is pure and holy. Only such can "see his face", i.e. find acceptance in His presence and be made "like Him" physically. Note the same thought sequence in 1 Jn. 3:1-3 and Heb. 12:14.

7. **Blessed are the Peacemakers—Matt. 5:9.** This quality is a product of the perfect character. Before the disciple can possibly make peace, he must quieten his own restless spirit (cp. Pro. 16:32; 25:28). Peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). James repeats the thoughts of Jesus when he says that "Wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable". The opposite is true of the impure who have "bitter envying and strife in THEIR HEARTS" (Jas. 3:14-18). The pure MAKE peace, and are not merely peaceable. They are constructive and bind up that which is



wounded (Isa. 58:12). Peace is so difficult to maintain that it has to be “made”, “pursued” and eagerly desired (Jas. 3:18; Psa. 34:14; Eph. 4:3).

Peacemakers are the “Sons of God”. They reflect in degree the quality in which Jesus their elder brother is forever supreme (cp. Eph. 2:4; Rom. 5:1; Isa. 9:6).

8. **Blessed are they which are Persecuted for Righteousness’ Sake—Matt. 5:10-12; cp. Isa. 66:5.** The character of the Saint is not attractive to the world. Jesus’ disciples would fellowship his sufferings and share the impact of hatred and cruelty with him. The measure of their faith would be the measure of their persecution. Suffering would develop trust and strength of character. They, too, would be made “perfect through suffering” (Heb. 2:10; 5:8-9).

Note particularly in v.10 and v.11 that “for righteousness’ sake” is equivalent to “for my sake”. In Jesus the righteousness of God is declared. In these words he speaks personally: “Blessed are YE”. They were the ones who would bear his name to the world and would suffer for it (1 Cor. 4:9-13). Yet their persecutions would align them with Jesus and the prophets. This would give them incentive, for they would be assured of reward in the Kingdom. Rather than be sad, they had cause to leap for joy (cp. Acts 5:41; 1 Pet. 4:13-14; 3:14; Phil 1:29).

#### LESSONS FOR US:

- The character revealed in the Beatitudes is that of the complete man of God found in the Lord Jesus Christ himself.
- In addition, they describe the process whereby a man grows from stage to stage in seeking to attain Christ’s example.
- The steps are:—
  - 1) Renunciation of the world;
  - 2) Mourning for Zion’s fulness;
  - 3) Teachableness — a readiness to receive God’s Word;
  - 4) A longing for God’s ways to be upheld, or vindicated;
  - 5) A readiness to forgive—as sternness must be balanced with kindness;
  - 6) True inward motivation—a heart unalloyed, undivided in its loyalty, into which God is free to enter, and out of which He may be seen;
  - 7) A man, himself mended by exclusion of sin, who seeks to restore, or mend, others;
  - 8) Character, weak and insufficient by the world’s standards, but which is its own criticism of the world, and for which one may expect to suffer, as Christ did.

The roots of the Beatitudes are found in the soil of the Old Testament. In these brief statements is found the essence of the prophets—the distillation of the Hope of Israel.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “The Teaching of the Master” (L. G. Sargent)—Part II  
“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 4, Chapters 9, 10  
“The Sermon on the Mount” (J. Luke)—Pages 1-7

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What are the “Beatitudes”? Comment briefly on two of the lessons they have for us.*
2. *Whose character is described in the Beatitudes? How can we try to attain that same character?*
3. *How can the deceitful and wicked heart of man (Jer. 17:9) be made “pure”?*
4. *“They shall see God”. What does this mean?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Briefly describe the character of the saint as outlined in the Beatitudes.*
2. *Explain the terms “blessed”, “poor in spirit” and “theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”.*
3. *Write an essay on three of the Beatitudes.*

## 7. JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES

### (b) Principles of Discipleship in Action

**“Whosoever heareth these sayings and doeth them,  
I will liken him unto a wise man . . .”**

*Jesus had just described the characteristics of the perfect man. He now proceeds to outline the morality which springs from such a character. The Beatitudes are the seed from which the other aspects find radiant expression. The qualities they demand are transformed into practical issues.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see these practical issues as they affect our own lives.*

### **Matthew 5, 6, 7**

#### **CHRIST AND MOSES.**

Moses' Law judged outward acts, but Christ's Law judges the thoughts from which acts spring. Jesus took the matter from the external view to the internal, from the outside to the inside. It is in the mind that the seeds of sin are sown and develop (Jas. 1:14-15). If they are rooted out, acts of sin cannot possibly find expression. To illustrate this principle, Jesus frequently contrasts his Law with the Law of Moses.

#### **ANGER FORBIDDEN (Matt. 5:21-24).**

Whereas Moses' Law judged the murderer, Jesus saw in anger the cause of murder, and he condemned that. If one would be reconciled to God, one must have a desire to be reconciled to one's brother. Acceptable worship is impossible where offence is known and not remedied. Even at what appears to be the most sacred moment ("the offering of gifts"), reconciliation with man is more important to God than sacrifice (cp. Eph. 4:26-27).

#### **THE NURSING OF WRATH FORBIDDEN (Matt. 5:25-26; cp. Prov. 25:8).**

Jesus enjoins humility and submission where a fault is found in his servants. Pride and stubbornness could lead to more serious consequences and bring shame upon his name.

#### **ADULTEROUS THOUGHTS FORBIDDEN (Matt. 5:27-32).**

The very contemplation of adultery is tantamount to the act. To look leads to lust and to lust is to commit adultery in the heart. Far better not to look (Job 31:1). The only barrier to the desired act could be lack of opportunity, so in God's eyes the desire amounts to the same thing.

And this principle applies to any act where faith is undermined. Jesus broadens the scope. "Eye" and "hand" are put for desires and deeds. It is better to sacrifice part of this mortal life than to lose one's whole life in the time to come.

The lesson is that transgression can be avoided by a determination to obey the Word of God. If the space in our hearts and mind is occupied by the positive things of the Truth, evil thoughts will be crowded out (Rom. 13:14).

### **SWEARING OF OATHS FORBIDDEN (Matt. 5:33-37).**

If only those words spoken by oath were considered binding upon a person, what of words without an oath? Is a person in that event freed from his undertakings? Of course not! Oaths had come to be used very lightly, and God's very existence was held in question when undertakings preceded by such oaths as, "As God liveth" were not performed. This was serious. "Let your communication be, Yea, Yea; Nay, Nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil".

### **THE WAY OF NON-RESISTANCE (Matt. 5:38-42).**

In Christ, the accent is upon the individual, not the nation or the state. Therefore, the old state-level "eye for eye" justice no longer applies. In Christ, the state has vanished and will not re-appear until the Kingdom is established. The individual is a pilgrim and a wayfarer, and Christ commands his conduct towards other men.

In three illustrations of compulsion, Jesus counsels non-resistance to evil; viz. personal injury (v.39), harsh exactions (v.40), and compulsions by "the powers that be" (v.41). In the fourth case (v.42) there is no compulsion. The disciple is free to comply or refuse and so the test is harder. But he is to be generous of heart to all who might ask, not necessarily giving exactly what is asked, but certainly giving what is needed to help the asker.

The object of non-resistance is to purge one's own bitterness, and to take the initiative from the offender and win him to the higher principles of salvation.

### **THE LAW OF LOVE (Matt. 5:43-48).**

Far from having enemies, Jesus commands a positive assault "To love . . . bless . . . do good . . . pray . . ." This is action—the action of love in which the disciple wrests the initiative from the offender and fights him with weapons he does not understand. This is the way that right triumphs over evil. Wrong has no answer to the assault of love. Justice may check a wrong doer by fear, but love conquers him.

In so acting, the disciple manifests the Father who positively **MAKETH** his sun to rise and **SENDETH** his rain on the just **and** unjust. God by this means shows love for "his enemies" and wills their salvation and, in so doing, sets a pattern of conduct for His children (Rom. 5:8-10; Jn. 3:16).

If love is confined to the family circle and those who love us, we are no different from unscrupulous publicans and reflect no particular likeness to the Father. Our love, like the sun, must shine on all, if we would be perfect, as is our Father in heaven (vv.46-48).

### **THE SIN OF HYPOCRISY (Matt. 6:1-18).**

The word “alms” in verse 1 should be “righteousness” (refer mg). In what follows, Jesus is more specific. In vv.2-4 he repudiates public display in almsgiving; in vv.5-6 praying in conspicuous places; and vv.16-18 counterfeit fasting. In each case he denounces such religion, motivated by present self-interest, as being of no avail in attaining a reward of the Father. Such alms, prayers and fasts were not spontaneous expressions of worship born of love for God, but the price necessary to pay for the good opinion of men. It was devotion offered to no God but themselves. It was merely a theatrical performance for which they received the applause of men, and that would be all they would get.

Basically, the sin of hypocrisy is rooted in unbelief. It is impossible to serve God if we are wholly pre-occupied with gaining the esteem of men (cp. Lk. 16:15; Jn. 5:44; Jude 16).

### **FAITH AND THE TRUE RICHES (Matt. 6:19-21).**

True worship has been contrasted with hypocrisy and now true treasure is contrasted with greed. Hypocrisy and greed are twin perils in the pursuit of righteousness. The “righteousness” of hypocrites is hollow and so are their riches. Their riches are symbols of this world which will perish with those who set their heart in it (v.19). The heart will turn as surely as the needle of a compass to what we really value (vv.20-21).

### **THE FATHER’S GIFT AND SON’S RESPONSE (Matt. 7:7-12).**

The disciple is encouraged to persist—to ask, seek, and knock—for as persistence prevails even over evil men, “how much more” shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts (cp. Jas. 1:5-7; Matt. 15:21-28; Lk. 11:5-13). If human stubbornness can be worn down, how much more ready to answer our pleas is our gracious and loving Heavenly Father? The contrasts are compelling. In verse 12 is the Golden Rule: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that man should do to you, do even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”. This is an extension of Ch. 6:14-15. God’s example gives the incentive and power to conform. Dark human nature is lightened by God’s love (2 Cor. 5:14-15). This is the essential message of the law and prophets; and amounts to the two great commandments (cp. Matt. 22:37-40).

### **TWO WAYS, TWO TREES, TWO BUILDERS (Matt. 7:13-27).**

In conclusion, Jesus gives three Parables:

1. **Two Ways (vv.13-14):** Like Moses, he sets before his disciples two

ways and the fact that they would have to make a choice (Deut. 30:15-20). There could be no middle path and the right way would not be popular.

2. **Two Trees (vv. 15-20):** To guide them in the way, two classes of men would offer **their** services. To discern the true from the deceitful, the disciple would have to examine the fruit of both, for like a tree, the fruit is true to its kind (Gen. 1:12). Fruit is seen in words and works. If their words were not in accordance with the "law and testimony" and their works not after the example of Christ, they could safely be rejected (cp. Isa. 8:20; 1 Pet. 4:11).
3. **Two Builders (vv. 24-27):** The Word divides humanity into wise and foolish. Those who assimilate the Word ("these sayings of mine") are building on a solid foundation (cp. 1 Cor. 3:11). The storm is soon to try all houses and wise builders will work with this in mind (cp. 2 Tim. 2:15).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- In thus outlining the morality of the kingdom, Jesus specified the qualities that will characterise those worthy of His Kingdom.
- At the same time, he makes it clear that He will be judge of all who seek to enter the Kingdom (7:21). There can be no greater incentive for attention to the qualities he desires than this.
- We need to be like the wise man who built upon a firm foundation — the foundation of the Truth, believed, understood, and acted upon.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- "The Teaching of the Master" (L. G. Sargent)—Parts III-VI
- "A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Book 4, Chapters 11, 12
- "The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 8, Pages 152-159
- "The Sermon on the Mount" (J. Luke)—Pages 9-24

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Where does sin commence and how can it be avoided? Use Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount to illustrate your answer.*
2. *What does Jesus say about faith and riches in the Sermon on the Mount?*
3. *The Father "sendeth rain on the just and unjust". What was Jesus teaching by this statement in the Sermon on the Mount?*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *How is Jesus' teaching contrasted with the Law of Moses? Give four illustrations from the Sermon on the Mount.*
2. *Tell what you know about the two "ways", the two "trees" and the two "builders" in the Sermon on the Mount.*
3. *Relate the character revealed in the Beatitudes to the practical instructions about living in the latter part of the Sermon on the Mount.*

## 8. JESUS TEACHES HIS DISCIPLES HOW TO PRAY

“Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name”

*In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave to his followers a pattern of what prayer should be like. God speaks to man through His Word, and man replies in prayer. The Word reveals our God as a loving heavenly Father, Who cares for man and upon Whom man can depend. Prayer then is the outworking of faith and should increase as we perceive God working in our lives in answer to our petitions.*

*The aim of this lesson is to be led by Jesus to the right way to pray.*

### Matthew 6

#### **WRONG AND RIGHT WAYS TO PRAY (Matt. 6:5-8).**

Jesus begins his instructions about prayer with a warning: “When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men”. While they appeared to be worshipping God, they were really cultivating the admiration of men. They loved to be seen of men, and this was clear from their choice of prominent places in which to pray. They were like play actors who take upon themselves a role foreign to their real lives. As their ostentatious piety received from men their desired reward, they could not expect from God a future one: “They **have** their reward”.

The place of true prayer is in secret when the door is shut and the soul alone with God. Such prayer by Elisha received the desired response from God in the case of the Shunamite (2 Kgs. 4:33-37). Already Jesus had taught his disciples this by example as well as precept. They had searched and found him in a “solitary place”, gaining strength in prayer to pursue the arduous tasks of another day (Mk. 1:35) and they became aware of his relationship with his Father and his dependence upon Him. (See Lesson 9.)

Jesus adds a second warning: “Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking”. We must avoid “mechanical” praying in which the same things are said over and over again in parrot-like repetition. Our words must be the expression of the sincere desire of our hearts. God “searches the heart” and if our prayers bear little resemblance to our inmost desires, then they will repulse Him. Repetition implies that God is not all-knowing because He does not hear the first time, or “know our needs before we ask”. In itself it evidences a lack of faith. Thereby worship is relegated to the level of “the heathen”. Then the response from God will be the same as Baal’s, when his worshippers were put to shame before Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:26).

## THE LORD'S PRAYER (Matt. 6:9-15).

After the Lord had given two warnings about prayer, he directed the disciple's attention to the right way to pray. The importance of this "model prayer" can be seen from the fact that on a different occasion, when the Lord was asked how to pray, he repeated in essence the same prayer (Lk. 11:1-4). It should be noted that the language is SIMPLE, as of a child speaking to his father, and is COMPREHENSIVE, though brief. When the Lord said that prayer should be "after this manner", he did not mean that all prayer should be exactly the same as this one, but that the general lines — the balance of emphasis, the perspective, the simplicity—should approximate this one. Because the prayer is brief, we can analyse it easily and learn much about man's place before God and his dependence upon Him, for in it God's glory and purpose are placed ahead of human needs.

The prayer breaks up into four parts:—

### 1. **Opening Address—"Our Father, which art in heaven":**

The prayer begins with worship, not asking. The disciple can join with Jesus in addressing God as "Father". Although God on four occasions is so addressed under the Old Covenant (cp. 1 Chron. 29:10; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Deut. 32:6), with the coming of the Son of God there is a new emphasis—believers are encouraged to call God, "Father": "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:4-6). In Christ we enjoy the intimacy and privileges that exist in the "father-son relationship" — care (6:26, 30, 32; 7:11), pity (Psa. 103:13), heirship (Rom. 8:17) and even chastisement (Heb. 12:4-9). The mention of His dwelling-place, "in heaven", at once makes us contemplate His power and holiness, and so cautions familiarity (cp. Ecc. 5:2).

### 2. **Three Petitions Relating to God—**

i) "**Hallowed be thy Name**": These words seem to be drawn from the opening verse of Psalm 103, which is a meditation on the name or character of God as revealed to Moses (Ex. 34:6-8). Notice how many of the thoughts of this Psalm are also found in the Lord's prayer. The Psalmist "hallows" the Father's name by recalling His wonderful qualities which are the basis of human redemption (v.12)—forgiveness, loving kindness, tender mercies — and which must also be found in the characters of those who profess to be His sons. But today God's name is profaned by men at large because they disregard Him and disobey Him (cp. Amos 2:7; Isa. 52:5). In effect this petition seeks for the day of the Kingdom when men will "know Yahweh" and worship Him in holiness. The words of our hymn well express the idea: "Thy name be hallowed far and near: To thee all nations bow".

ii) and iii) "**Thy Kingdom Come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven**": Instead of personal requests, again the Father is put to the fore. So attuned is the disciple's mind to the purpose and glory



of God that he earnestly desires its fulfilment. Human governments have failed to bring justice and equity; divine government is essential.

Only one who “seeks first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”, as Jesus later advised (v.33), can with clear conscience utter these words. Jesus said “not my will but thine be done” and this must be the maxim for all his disciples. We cannot sincerely pray for God’s will to be done upon earth in the future, if today we fail to do it ourselves.

### 3. Three Petitions Relating to Man’s Need—

i) **“Give us this day our daily bread”**: “Our daily bread” is translated “our bread for the morrow” in the RSV margin. The “daily bread” seems to have been the amount of food given to slaves, soldiers or labourers and allotted a day beforehand (cp. Lk. 12:42). In this petition the disciple acknowledges his dependence upon God for his immediate needs. He has learned to trust in God and to be content with food and raiment. Too much concern about future security shows a lack of faith in the Father’s care and ability to provide. Do we have that faith in our heavenly Father that gives us contentment, and enables us to limit our requests to immediate needs, in the knowledge that He loves us and will preserve us?

But men are not only in need of the bread of the cornfield; they need also the “bread of heaven” to be sustained unto eternal life. A loving heavenly Father has provided both.

ii) **“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”**: Here there is the acknowledgement of the need for God’s mercy and grace, which is now freely available to those who are baptised in the Name of Jesus Christ: there is no forgiveness outside of him (Jn. 8:24; Acts 4:12). True prayer must be cast in a tone of humility and repentance. But, alas, the extent that God will forgive is dependent on the petitioner’s own willingness to forgive. He can limit the extension of God’s grace toward himself by his harshness and bitterness towards others! “He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy” (Jas. 2:13). So important is this matter that the Lord comes back to it, and it alone, at the conclusion of the prayer (verses 14 and 15 read naturally on from verse 12). All disciples, however highly esteemed they might be by men, must remember that they are both forgiven and in need of forgiveness, and therefore must grant it to others. The parable of the Unforgiving Creditor brings this lesson home in the most poignant way (Matt. 18:23-35, see Lesson 16) and the apostle Paul extends this vital teaching in Eph. 4:32 and Col. 3:13. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican essentially portrays one man who prayed without being aware of his sins and needs and the other who was, and so, despite his sin, he was justified “rather than the other” (Lk. 18:11-14).

iii) **“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”**: The

disciple is conscious of his weaknesses in trial and that he is liable to fail. For this reason he eschews temptation, and desires that he might not be led into it. But he knows too, that it is “through much tribulation” that he must enter into the Kingdom (Acts 14:22), and that “whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth” (Heb. 12:6). Therefore he prays to be “delivered from evil”. The lessons are—be aware of your weaknesses and when in trouble pray to God (cp. 2 Tim. 4:18; Psa. 34).

- 4. Conclusion: Praise to God—“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen”:** As the prayer begins, so it ends, with praise and worship to God. God must “enclose” and govern all of our requests: He must pervade our hopes because His “kingdom” shall fulfil them—His sons shall be redeemed by His “power”, and His “glory” shall be shared by them (Rom. 2:7; 5:2; 8:18). These final words are the same as those spoken by King David on the occasion when he and Israel gave willingly and liberally for the Temple and Solomon was made king. David’s grasp, as seen in this prayer, of the smallness of man in the light of the greatness of God, provides us with profitable reflection (see 1 Chron. 29:10-19).

#### **FURTHER INSTRUCTION ABOUT PRAYER.**

The Lord’s prayer is our guide; it is important to apply its lessons to ourselves. The Lord had other things to say about prayer, as did also the apostles, and it will be good for us to summarise them briefly:

- We must pray to God in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the appointed mediator, priest, and advocate (Jn. 16:23; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25; 1 Jn. 2:1).
- We must be earnest and frank in prayer (Jas. 5:16-18; Matt. 7:7-11).
- We must pray often (Lk. 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17).
- We must persist in prayer as an evidence of genuine desire (Lk. 11:5-13).
- We must offer petitions in faith and without any doubt about God’s ability and willingness to give (Matt. 7:9-11; Mk. 11:24; Jas. 1:6-8).
- We must ask for that which is in accordance with the Father’s will (1 Jn. 5:14; Jas. 4:3).
- We must remember to be thankful for all of God’s gifts (Eph. 5:20; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 4:3-5).
- We must be watchful and not sleepy (Col. 4:2).

There will be no answer to prayers if they are mechanical and formal; if the motive is carnal, if there is disobedience (1 Sam. 28:6), or if there is wavering and doubt.

### LESSONS FOR US:

- Jesus has given us a model prayer in which the right attitude of the worshipper before God can be seen.
- We must take account of what Jesus says, for as we grow in Christ, this prayer should more truly express our feelings: we can never “improve” upon it
- Prayer evidences trust in God, and is a barometer of our spiritual growth.
- Whatever we do or decide, should first have been taken to the Father in prayer.
- Prayer should be frank, sincere, simple, strenuous, humble, unceasing and watchful.
- Prayer is a need we cannot afford to neglect. Our little strength, our inability to comfort others, must be fortified by fervent daily prayer. It must become part of our lives, not just routine but always vital and important. We are assured that then our prayers will be heard by an ever-loving heavenly Father.

### REFERENCE LIBRARY:

- “Teaching of the Master” (L. G. Sargent)—Part IV, Chapters 2-7
- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 143-144
- “A Prayer: Studies in Principle and Practice” (M. Purkis and C. Tennant)
- “Making Prayer Powerful” (H. P. Mansfield)
- “The Sermon on the Mount (J. Luke) Pages 25-41

### PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:

1. *What did Jesus say in the Sermon on the Mount about our attitude of mind when we pray?*
2. *What is the value of prayer?*
3. *“Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Comment on these phrases in the Lord’s prayer.*
4. *Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”. What does this teach us? Illustrate your answer by referring to the parable of the Unforgiving Creditor (Matt. 18).*

### ESSAY QUESTIONS:

1. *Choose three of the phrases in the Lord’s prayer and comment upon them, showing the lessons which they teach us.*
2. *Quote the Lord’s prayer and show how it places man in his correct relationship to God.*
3. *Write an essay about how the principles shown in the Lord’s prayer have affected your outlook.*

## Section 3

# PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Early in his public ministry, Jesus quoted Isaiah's summary of his mission on a sabbath day at Nazareth:

*“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”.*

(Luke 4:17-19; Isa. 61:1-2).

When all eyes were fastened upon him, Jesus said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (4:21). This was no son of Joseph in their midst. This was the Son of God, Immanuel (‘God with us’) who, as Peter later said of him, “went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him”.

For 3½ years the Lord faithfully fulfilled his work, teaching the good news of the Kingdom, giving encouragement to the poor, setting forth hope to those who had been bowed down with sin, healing some to show his divine authority, until finally he set his face towards Jerusalem and death. Section 3 of our lessons spans this period in the life of the Lord.

## 9. MIRACLES OF HEALING AT CAPERNAUM

“And Jesus moved with compassion, put forth his hand . . .”

*Capernaum became the headquarters of Jesus' Early Galilean Ministry. It was the home town of the most prominent of his disciples, Peter, Andrew, James and John, all of whom were fishermen. Jesus' fame began to spread abroad after he healed the demoniac in the synagogue in Capernaum. People were impressed, not only with the power of his miracles but also with the authority of his teaching. As a result vast multitudes came to him from "all the region round about Galilee".*

*Our aim in this lesson is to contemplate Jesus' popularity, dedication and compassion, as well as his authority and power.*

### Mark 1:29-45; 2:1-12

#### HEALING AT THE HOUSE IN CAPERNAUM (Mk. 1:29-34).

After the miracle in the synagogue, Jesus went immediately to the home of Peter where he lived with his brother Andrew, his wife and mother-in-law. They were confronted with sickness — Peter's mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. The disciples were learning to look to Jesus for help and full of expectation, “they tell him of her”; he who could cleanse a demoniac could surely revive their own dear friend. He could speak and disease was vanquished! In this incident and the scenes which followed that evening, they were to learn that as well as being ALL powerful, he was FULL of compassion. As the Lord took the hand of Peter's mother-in-law, he identified himself with the afflicted woman who lay before him. His touch would have imparted confidence to her. Jesus never divorced himself from the feelings of those with whom he dealt. Truly he “bare our sicknesses” (Isa. 53:4; Matt. 8:17). Jesus “lifted her up”, typifying the raising up of many who would place their confidence in him. He it is who will ultimately bring those related to him forth from the grave when he returns from heaven at his second advent (cp. Psa. 37:34; 30:3; 40:2).

Reports of the healing of the demoniac earlier in the day raised the hopes of many stricken with incurable diseases. At the end of the sabbath, “when the sun did set”, all the diseased and demented people were brought to him. The record says, “all the city was gathered together at the door”. Jesus healed them all. Imagine the change in attitude from anguish to joy. And remember the effect on all of the curious spectators who had come to watch. What a wonderful demonstration of the power of God!

In all this there was a demand upon Jesus' endurance. He was affected both physically and mentally as he sought not merely to heal, but to see that each one truly appreciated the goodness of God. Jesus'

acts of healing were more than outpourings of power: they were responsive acts of giving that which was of God to others.

### **MORNING OF PRAYER (Mk. 1:35-39).**

Though exhausted physically by the late night of healing activity, his body was refreshed with a few hours of sleep. But his mind yearned for his Father's presence and strength away from the pressing throng of people. Accordingly, "a great while before day", Jesus awoke and "departed into a solitary place and prayed" (cp. Matt. 6:6). Away from the distraction of human affairs he could tap the source of his inner strength without interruption by communion with his Father.

Early in the day there were signs that the proceedings of the night before would be repeated. But, Jesus was not to be found in the house. Peter led the search for him and at last they found him. To have come by the Lord in this solitary place in prayer must have been an unforgettable experience. They were beginning to learn that his acts of love and power, and the inner source of his life, had their roots in deep personal and sacred fellowship with the Father. If prayer was a need for him, how much more so for us, who lack his divine heritage and vision?

Peter came with the message: "All men seek for thee", expecting no doubt, that the Lord would hurry back to the house. Was he going to allow such an opportunity for publicity to pass? The Lord's reply must have confused them: "Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also; for therefore came I forth" (v.38). Was he callous and indifferent to human needs? Never. His ministry fell basically into two categories — healing and PREACHING. Healing would restore men's health for a limited time but preaching could save them eternally. Healing was merely the sign of his authority to speak. Thus preaching was his prime concern, and the reason why he had been sent (cp. Isa. 61:1). There was the danger that the present emphasis upon healing might affect this vital mission. So he left Capernaum to fulfil his mission. Perhaps his departure was a decision which resulted from his prayer. Moreover the people of Capernaum would in fact benefit; once the excitement had faded, they would have time to cogitate upon his words in the light of his works (cp. Jn. 5:36-38).

### **THE FIRST LEPER CLEANSED (Mk. 1:40-45).**

The Law of Moses decreed lepers to be social outcasts. They had to dwell outside the cities and towns (Num. 5:1-4). From a distance this leper witnessed Jesus' power: he saw the anguish of sickness transformed into the joy of health and he yearned for cleansing. With great daring and humility he came. Kneeling he besought the Lord, "if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean". His faith in Jesus' power to save him was not equalled by his confidence in Jesus' willingness to do so. He felt that the only thing that stood between him and cleansing was Jesus willingness to perform the task. Would not this Jesus be prejudiced against his class like all men? Jesus' reponse is notable:

“Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean” (v.41).

There was no reluctance in Jesus. It was entirely unnecessary to cajole mercy from him. Compassion was involved in all Jesus’ miracles and the leper was to learn that it would also be extended to him.

1. He “**touched**” him. This was an amazing thing as lepers were not to be touched as they conferred “defilement”.
2. “I will; be thou clean”. Here were words of cheer and solace. What do they mean to us? The Lord’s “I will” has never lost its effectiveness for the heart that believes he can save. Jesus never refused such. He always invited men to “come unto him” (cp. Isa. 55:1-3; Matt. 11:28-30).

The result was instantaneous healing. Instead of the Lord contracting defilement, he imparted cleansing. Leprosy was a disease which could only be removed by the divine hand that imposed it (Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kgs. 5:7-8). Here surely was the power of God.

Jesus requested the man to conceal what had happened from men and to show himself to the priests “as a testimony unto them” and to make the sacrifice required by the Law of Moses. Jesus never publicised his power or projected himself. Such marks belonged to human aspirants but had no part in the dignity belonging to Yahweh’s servant (Isa. 42:1-4; Matt. 12:16-20).

The disease of leprosy represents the curse of mortality in a dramatic portrayal, for the flesh visibly decomposes while the victim is alive. As mortality has come by sin, so this dread disease was given as a punishment in certain cases for sin (Num. 12:10; 2 Kgs. 5:7-8; 2 Chron. 26:19). The sacrifices required for its cleansing are typical of the redemptive work of the Lord. In this miracle we see a foreshadowing of the Lord’s work, for through him mortality shall be swallowed up in life.

### **THE HOUSETOP HEALING (Mk. 2:1-12).**

The leper did not heed Jesus’ instruction to “say nothing to any man”, but blazoned abroad the news of his cure. By his action large crowds were attracted to Jesus, making it necessary for him to abide in the desert. And yet despite this “they came to him from every quarter” (Mk. 1:45). “After some days” when the initial enthusiasm had abated, Jesus again ventured into “the house” in Capernaum.

As the news of his return circulated, the people again crowded about him. The doorways were jammed by those anxious to make his acquaintance. This posed a problem to a company of men anxious to see the healing of a palsied friend, whom they bore upon a bed. How could they present him to the healer again present in their midst? Faith found a way. They lifted him to the roof, peeled back part of it and lowered him down in the presence of all! Jesus’ preaching was interrupted and the palsied man became the focus of attention. This deed

may have appeared presumptuous. What sort of reaction would he then receive?

Jesus was impressed with the faith which lay behind his coming to him: “without faith, it is impossible to please God”. The palsied man believed, and was forgiven and healed: the prescription for salvation is no different today (Mk. 16:16). There is an impressive lesson in all this — Jesus does not turn away those who seek him with a true heart (Matt. 7:7-8).

But there were those in the audience who took exception to him forgiving sins: “Why doth this man speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” Strange emotions began to stir in the hearts of the scribes, whose prestige and standing was suffering as Jesus rose in popularity among the people. Already they had been unfavourably compared (Mk. 1:22). The seeds of jealousy were already beginning to take root, and at length they would develop into open hatred and murder. Jesus was conscious of their feelings. There was nothing wrong with questioning whether a man had God’s authority to forgive sins. But there was much wrong with such doubts when the evidence that established this authority was rejected.

Jesus was going to provide them with reason to accept that he had such authority. It was easy for any man to say, “thy sins be forgiven thee”; it was much more difficult to say to a palsied man, “Arise, take up thy bed and walk”. The evidence of healing could be tested by eye-witnesses, but forgiveness is not something which can be seen. In healing the man, Jesus was giving abundant proof that he had authority from God to forgive sins.

The miracle led many to belief, for they glorified God saying, “We never saw anything like this” (Weymouth). In contrast, the persistent refusal of the rulers to see God’s approval of Jesus in the mighty works, led ultimately to their destruction.

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus was not indifferent to the feelings and weaknesses of those about him.
- His touch and his works brought peace of mind and comfort to the afflicted people who sought him out. We can be assured of his interest in us and his concern for our spiritual welfare.
- Healing was a major witness used by Jesus to give emphasis to the Truth that he was preaching.
- Jesus taught that disease and death (i.e. mortality) can only be overcome by faith in the power of God. If we develop a faith similar to that of those people who were healed, then we too can escape from the consequences of sin at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.



**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Pages 101-113

“The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Pages 25-35

“Law and Grace” (W. F. Barling)—Pages 191-192

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How did Jesus seek encouragement from his Father to perform the work before him? Illustrate your answer by referring to the events at Capernaum.*
2. *Jesus “bare our sicknesses”, said the prophet Isaiah. Show the truth of this statement by referring to the events at Capernaum.*
3. *Describe the healing of the palsied man at Capernaum. How did Jesus prove on that occasion that he had authority to forgive sins?*
4. *Why did Jesus perform miracles?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Write an account of miracles performed by Jesus in the region of Capernaum during his Early Galilean ministry. What lessons can be drawn from them?*
2. *Write an account of the healing of the first leper to come to Jesus. How did Jesus surpass the Law of Moses in dealing with a leper?*
3. *Write an essay on the way that Jesus used miracles to show he had the authority of God.*

## 10. BETHESDA: HEALING ON THE SABBATH DAY

“Rise, take up thy bed and walk”

*In this lesson, Jesus comes to Jerusalem for the second recorded occasion of his ministry and at the pool of Bethesda heals a cripple of 38 years on the Sabbath Day. This is the third sign recorded in John's Gospel. This action provoked persecution by the Jews and led to a lengthy dissertation by Jesus in which he showed the true significance of the Sabbath Law which they had completely failed to grasp. He proceeded to speak of the intimate relationship he had with the Father, and of the authority which had been delegated to him. He concluded by listing the irrefutable witnesses to his claims and by warning them that, unless they changed their attitude towards him, they would forfeit eternal life.*

*The aim of this lesson is to see Jesus' authority and power supported by three irrefutable witnesses.*

### John 5

#### **THE IMPOTENT MAN HEALED (Jn. 5:1-9).**

There was a pool near the north-east corner of the Temple called Bethesda, meaning “House of Mercy”. There large numbers of sick folk gathered waiting anxiously so that they might be first in after the movement of the waters. The pool seems to have been fed by an intermittent spring whose waters had increased medicinal properties after being disturbed. This apparently natural phenomenon was popularly accredited to an angel. This John explains in verse 4, which can be considered as being in parenthesis. There is no justification for the omission of this verse from some translations.

Jesus made his way through the streets and stood in the midst of the suffering expectant multitude. The water had not yet stirred and the atmosphere was tense and silent as the impotent and their friends and relatives concentrated, with a selfishness born out of the greatness of their pain and need, on seeing the first shimmer of movement.

As Jesus watched he found amid the pitiful sight the saddest case of all: a man lying on the steps with no man to help him (v.6). For 38 years he had endured his infirmity. Despair was written on his face. Jesus stood over the man but his presence awakened no response. The man did not know him, had no faith in him, and made no demands of him. In this he symbolised Israel: because of unbelief an earlier generation had been punished for 38 years, and today they are “halt” and have more faith in superstition and their own power than God's appointed Son (Mic. 4:7; Num. 14:33-34; Deut. 2:14).

Suddenly he heard a voice addressing him, “Do you want to be healed?” (v.6 RSV). Jesus no doubt knew that he had dragged himself there and that others were always quicker to reach the water. The

despair in his eyes was emphasised in his voice: "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool" (v.7). His faith still lingered in the black waters below. Had he at last found a friend to help him into the water? But Jesus directed his thoughts from such lowly expectations, and with a strong voice he gave command, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk". Instinctively the man obeyed: he bent down, rolled up his bed and stood up. He found a freedom not known for 38 years. He turned to face the one he had obeyed, but Jesus had gone.

All eyes would have turned towards this chronic invalid, the unhappiest of them all now moving among them joyful and elated. The waters below could bubble and subside unnoticed for there was now a greater source of power and healing in Israel.

### **JESUS EXPLAINS THE TRUE MEANING OF THE SABBATH LAW (Jn. 5:10-20).**

But, alas, the cure had been done on the Sabbath day in which no work was to be performed. The man bearing his bed was accosted by the Jews and reprimanded for the breach. The man justified his action on the grounds that his healer wielded divine power and hence also divine authority. He had specifically told him to take up his bed! What had he done wrong? The wilful blindness of the Jews can be seen when it is remembered that he was a familiar figure, a cripple for many years. They dismissed from their minds the wonder of his cure which could have led them also to a higher appreciation of Jesus and the Sabbath Law.

In the Temple, appropriately, healer and healed came face to face, and Jesus completed the cure commenced on the steps. Characteristically the spiritual cure followed the natural: "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more" Sin is the root cause of suffering and if persisted in after healing will lead to something worse; death itself (v.14). In gratitude, most likely, the man told the Jews who it was that had healed him. But their purposes were evil and like birds of prey they swooped, taking no cognisance of the miracle. They persecuted and sought to slay him for what they held were abuses of the Sabbath law—healing a man and telling him to carry his bed on the Sabbath (v.16).

Many of Jesus' miracles were performed on the Sabbath (e.g. Mk. 2:23-28; 3:1-7). Jesus, the Jews asserted, should have waited. But behind Jesus' actions there lies profound Truth. He said: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (v.17 RSV). God had been and was **working** to restore the "**rest**" hallowed by Him at Creation, but violated by man's sin. God was ceaselessly active on man's behalf and had now sent His Son that the true rest might be inaugurated through his saving work (Matt. 11:28-30). Jesus was doing God's work, continuing His example and objectives. The evidence of God's determination to bring about this ultimate "**rest**" for man in the Kingdom could be seen in His hallowing the seventh day and making observance

of it so stringent a matter (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 31:15-17). Seeing Jesus had the same objective as God (the granting of release to those in sin's bondage), no day could be more appropriate than the Sabbath, for Jesus to work miracles of healing.

On this occasion Jesus took the highest argument — that his actions were copies of his Father's. Later Jesus justified his disciples' plucking of corn ears on the Sabbath by pointing out that as Son of man he was Lord also of the Sabbath. The Son of man had been promised dominion over "**all things**" and this included the Sabbath Law (Mk. 2:27-28; Psa. 8:2-6). He taught that the "Sabbath was made for man"; it was designed for his well-being and not his destruction. Man should not thoughtlessly breach it except in times of need, when his highest good came into conflict with the Sabbath Law.

Later again Jesus even taught a lesson from their own practice. He pointed out that they would judge it right to exercise an humane spirit to lift an ox or ass from a pit on the Sabbath (Lk. 14:5; 13:15-16). He taught that the Sabbath spirit was more highly observed when acts of compassion and goodness were done. Thus Jesus did not excuse himself for his breach of the Sabbath law, but sought to lead them through it to an appreciation of God's purpose in him.

But his words went unappreciated and, in fact, were made the basis of an additional accusation: because he called God his Father, he was charged with "making himself equal with God" (v.18). In his next words Jesus effectively annuls both charges: "The Son can DO nothing of himself" (v.19). In this remarkable statement he pleads his **dependence** not his **equality** with God, and as for the works, the Father had done them, thus authenticating them. He then revealed his intimate fellowship with his Father: the Father "loves the Son" and "shows" him what He does, and the Son sees and does likewise. He had knowledge of his Father's acts and will, which were his guide. If they should wonder at such a display of healing, what would the effect be upon them of "greater works" (vv.19-20)?

### **"GREATER WORKS" OF JESUS TO FULFIL THE SABBATH SIGN (Jn. 5:21-30).**

Jesus ominously pointed out that the Father had bestowed even greater honour upon him; he had been given authority to raise, judge and give life to "whom he will". The very prerogatives of the Father had been committed to the Son. What would the position then be of those who challenged him and sought to slay him?

In verses 24-28 Jesus revealed his authority to his hearers. By acceptance of him and his Father, they could be related to life instead of death—so sure was the promise that continued obedience would ensure eternal life. Note that eternal life is not a present possession but a hope (Titus 1:2), or promise (1 Jn. 2:25), to be obtained at the resurrection (v.29). The guarantee lay in the fact that the Father, "the fountain of

of life" (Ps. 36:9; 1 Tim. 6:16), had entrusted the same life-giving power to him. Moreover, seeing he was Son of man, and thus "touched with the feeling of our infirmities", he was chosen by God to be a sacrifice for man, a high priest for man, and the judge of man (Heb. 2:13-18; 4:14-16; Jn. 5:27). In this way the redemptive work of man, which commenced with belief (v.24), would culminate in resurrection unto life. But in the case of those who refused, there would be condemnation (v.29). Herein lay his warning to them. Nor could they escape: those who heard him and saw his mighty works would "all" be responsible and answerable to him. Literally all men will not be raised (cp. Ps. 49:20; Eph. 2:1, 12); the "all" of verse 28 refers to both classes of hearers—rejecters and accepters.

### **THREEFOLD WITNESS TO HIS AUTHENTICITY (Jn. 5:31-47).**

If it should be claimed that Jesus was a self-projectionist, there were other witnesses to his claims. True, his claims were all embracing; so anticipating objection, he placed before them three witnesses.

#### **1. The Witness of John—vv.31-35.**

They had sent to John and had been told plainly that he was not the Christ, but that the Christ was soon to be revealed and that he was preparing men's hearts for him (Jn. 1:19-27). While John's witness had been received "for a season", Jesus' professed relationship with the Father was so intimate that he required more than man's testimony: God alone could provide the evidence, without which every other form of support would be suspect. Hence the second witness was:—

#### **1. The Witness of the Father through the Works—vv.36-38.**

Jesus constantly brought to their attention the plain implication behind all his mighty works — that God was with him (cp. Jn. 10:32; 15:24). Their repudiation of such irrefutable evidence proved conclusively that they had not the true teaching of the Father's Word (vv.37-38). Thus they neglected the third witness:—

#### **3. The Witness of the Word—vv.39-47.**

Verses 39-40 in the RSV read: "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; AND it is they that bear witness of ME; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life". Here was a remarkable thing: Christ was the heart and focus of the O.T. scriptures they studied, and yet they repudiated him. What was the cause of such blindness? A courting of human praise and glory, rather than divine approval. Their last hope was taken from them when he said that Moses, in whose law they sought justification, would be their accuser: it was impossible to believe Moses and reject Jesus, for Moses wrote of him (Deut. 18:15-18).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus has been given the power of resurrection and judgment which

he will personally supervise. Unbelief of him today will bring rejection by him tomorrow, but acceptance now will mean joy and immortality with him in the Kingdom.

- The Sabbath sign spoke of God's continual work for man's salvation and rest, and not his destruction. In Jesus Christ we can rest now from vain human travail and labour in God's vineyard "to enter that rest" of the 1000 years.
- Jesus supports his great claims with three witnesses, both human and divine, which cannot be dismissed.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Gospel of John" (J. Carter)—Chapter 5

"A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Book 3, Chapter 5

"Law and Grace" (W. F. Barling)—Pages 192-193

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *The impotent man at the pool of Bethesda had been diseased for 38 years. In what way did he represent the nation of Israel?*
2. *Why was it right for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath day?*
3. *The Jews charged Jesus after he healed the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda with claiming equality with God. How did Jesus show that this was false?*
4. *Comment briefly on the three witnesses to the work of Jesus which he spoke of after the healing at the pool of Bethesda.*

#### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Give an account of what happened at the pool of Bethesda when Jesus healed the impotent man?*
2. *Jesus said: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Jn. 5:17). Explain what he meant.*
3. *What witnesses did Jesus bring forward to support his claims when he reproved the Jews after healing at the pool of Bethesda?*

## 11. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

**“Behold a sower went forth to sow . . .”**

*The Word of God, depicted in this parable as the seed, was faultless. Whether it took root and grew to produce seed depended entirely upon the nature of the soil in which it lodged. When we receive the Word of God in our hearts we must carefully nurture it. We must make sure that the influences of the world and problems we face do not stifle its growth and prevent it from bringing forth fruit.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to learn the right and wrong ways to receive the Word of God.*

### **Matthew 13:1-23**

#### **A NEW METHOD OF TEACHING.**

Jesus had taught by **PREACHING** the things relating to the kingdom of God and the character required of those who would inherit it. The great **MIRACLES** had revealed God’s power and shown that his claim to be the Son of God was true. By **EXAMPLE**, too, he had powerfully shown God’s way; how to pray, how to forgive, how to show compassion.

At this point in his ministry we find a new emphasis: **PARABLES** become the basis of much of his teaching and preaching. The word “parable” comes from a Greek word meaning “to compare together”. The Lord compared natural things with spiritual things, in stories about every day familiar matters. Thus a parable is a story with a hidden meaning.

His new style was observed by the disciples and they asked the question: “Why speakest thou unto them in parables?” (Matt. 13:10). Before we consider his answer to this question we must take into account the change of circumstances. It was now midway through the second year of his ministry. The first flush of enthusiasm for him was passing and the rulers were already plotting his death. In Matthew 12 the Lord was opposed by the Pharisees who attributed his miracles to Beelzebub, a pagan god. The leaders rejected his claims and teaching, and criticised his labours. Jesus’ reason for speaking in parables was, as he expressed it to his disciples, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given” (Matt. 13:11). Parables served a two-fold purpose: to enlighten the humble and confound the proud. The humble-hearted who followed him stored the parable in their minds and, through meditation, its message was understood: but the critical who were prejudiced against him, did not take the lessons to heart and so did not understand his teaching (cp. vv.34-35). Thus to him that “had” humility would be added understanding and vice versa (v.12). In verses 13-15 Jesus spoke of the folly of those opposed to him. He said that the words of Isaiah

6:9-10 would find fulfilment in that generation. They would “hear” the parables spoken, but would not “understand” because THEY had in the first place become “dull of hearing”. In verses 16-17 Jesus told the disciples that they, by contrast, were highly privileged, for they saw and heard from his mouth things which holy men of old earnestly desired to see (cp. 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Parables then were a wonderful way of enlightening while confounding. They were easily remembered and recalled for they were taken from everyday experience. Those interested had their thoughts provoked and so gradually the meaning was unfolded, although many were not fully understood till after his resurrection. The apt and vivid parables which flowed apparently impromptu from the mouth of the Master are a clear hall-mark of the fact that he was the Son of God.

One of the foremost and earliest of Jesus’ parables is the parable of the Sower (cp. Mk. 4:13).

### **THE STORY OF THE SOWER (Matt. 13:1-9).**

Jesus was on the western shores of the lake of Galilee when he spoke this parable. From this position all types of soil were visible and it was the time of harvest (cp. Matt. 12:1). Before Jesus, as he sat in the boat, were great multitudes. His words were falling on their ears like seed when it is sown; his words would test the soil of their minds and divide them into categories. The simple story had a natural setting in Israel. Unlike today, when seed is sown mechanically, the sower would go forth with his bag of seed hung around his neck; casting handfuls from each hand alternately as he strode down the furrows. Across the field was the footpath or wayside; in the corners were the collections of stones, while in the good soil there were patches of thistles already taking root. Above him the burning sun shone, while birds, attracted by the scattered seed, gathered behind.

Jesus described in vivid language the fate of the wheat. The seed which fell on the wayside was easy meat for the birds and was devoured by them; that which fell on the stony ground, quickly germinated and as quickly was scorched by the sun and withered for lack of good soil; that which fell among thorns sprang up in competition with the well-established and stronger plants which choked it out of existence; and finally, that which fell on the good ground sprang up and flourished, yielding an increase in some cases of an hundredfold. The story was simple and easily-grasped as Jesus told it.

### **THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE (Matt. 13:18-23).**

In the case of the parable of the sower, we have the great advantage of the interpretation from Jesus’ own lips. What lesson was Jesus striving to teach those who had “ears to hear” from the parable? Clearly the emphasis is upon the differing kinds of soils. The same



kind of seed was sown — the good seed, the Word of God or the Word of the Kingdom (v.19)—but it fell into different kinds of soil. God's word is like a seed, small but able to reproduce itself many times, depending upon the heart of the hearer (cp. 1 Pet. 1:23; Jas. 1:21; 1 Jn. 3:9). Any gardener knows how important it is to have the correct soil properly prepared if labour is to be accompanied by success. The seed will test the soil; so, too, will the Word of God, spread and scattered by the Lord and his followers. The soil, then represents different kinds of people; and its reception, how they react when the Word of God is "sown" in their heart. Jesus describes four classes of men — the gospel sorts men out into groups. Of these the largest of all is made up of those who reject the Word outright — their minds are likened to the impervious wayside. Against these, however, stand the others who hear, for the seed in them takes root. But for them, believing is not an end: it is only the beginning and within this group, as a whole, experience unfailingly creates sub-divisions. Let us consider for our instruction each class.

### 1. **The Wayside or Footpath (v. 19):**

Trodden hard as stone, there is no chance for germination here. The seed, exposed upon the surface is a ready prey for birds. This type of person makes no response to the Word of God. The "wicked one" ("Satan" in Mk. 4:15; "the devil" in Lk. 8:12), like the birds, snatches it away before there is any reaction. In Jesus' day the Pharisees were like this. They heard the Word from his mouth, but as a class of men they were "dull of hearing" (cp. vv.14-15; Jn. 8:43-47). The blindness and pride inherent in human nature had prejudiced them fatally and they could not "hear" the Word of life. Those who put their faith in these established leaders were liable to the same fate. As the birds snatched away the seed, so any under their influence were discouraged from following Jesus: the blind were being led by the blind.

How might we apply this to our own day? Unbelief is rife today because men want to fulfil their lusts in various forms of pleasure-seeking, etc. Such desires stifle the influence of the Word at its threshold. In other cases false religion so biases thinking that reason is banished and the Word can take no effect.

### 2. **The Stony Place (vv. 20, 21):**

There is sufficient soil here for the Word to find lodgment, and germinate. But the soil is shallow and the roots cannot penetrate far before they strike the stone beneath. Deprived of moisture, healthy vigorous growth is soon stopped. The result is a quick springing up, followed by rapid wilting and death when the sun beats upon the seedling. The sun with its heat stands for the tribulation or trial that will inevitably accompany profession of the Truth. There are those who hear the Word and receive it quickly and enthusiastically, but have no real depth of conviction. They are of superficial character and are shallow-minded. When required to make a stand for the Truth and endure the shame, they "wilt", and reveal that they fear

men rather than God. How different were the apostles to this class (cp. Acts 3, 4, 5). Do we count it joy when required to suffer shame for the name of Christ? Or do we lack spiritual stamina and behave as our fellows might approve? The Lord commented in another place, "He that endureth unto the end shall be saved" (Matt. 10:22).

### 3. **Amongst Thorns (v. 22):**

The thorns are already growing strongly and the good seed, finding a place among them, germinates and begins to grow. But then commences a contest for soil nutrients, light and air. The thorns have a head start and in the course of time the young spindly seedlings are crowded out and give up the struggle.

Here we have a tragic picture. It is not for want of vigour that this class of "soil" or person fails; it is solely because their vigour is misdirected. Such expend themselves not only on the gospel, but also on those things which are destructive of it. The good seed and the worthless weed both grow together — but in soil, alas, which is more congenial to the latter than the former. So, steadily but remorselessly, "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" (Mk. 4:19). Here then, we have depicted the tragedy of a lifetime spent in discipleship with nothing by way of spiritual fruit to show for it in the end — a purely futile probation. Great service could have been rendered the Truth, for the soil had great productive capacity. But other competing influences took precedence — their roots robbed moisture and goodness from the soil and their leaves blocked the light and choked the good seed: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (cp. Matt. 6:24; Hag. 1:5-6). Compare as an example the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:22).

### 4. **Good Soil (v. 23):**

The seed falling on well-dug, well-drained, weed-free soil has every chance of bearing a goodly harvest. This soil represents the class of men who undoubtedly will inherit the kingdom. Twice before in Matthew's gospel Jesus had declared that men would be known by their fruits (7:20; 12:33). Such hear, understand and "receive" the Word (Mk. 4:20), unlike the 'wayside class'; they have depth of mind, the Word takes deep root so that they are able to withstand the day of trial (cp. Col. 2:7), unlike the 'stony ground class'; their lives are uncluttered by worldly ambitions and pursuits and so the Word flourishes without competition, unlike the 'thorny ground class'. True fruit can only be developed in association with the Christ (Jn. 15:4). The fruits of the Spirit, the end products of the influence of the Word upon true and honest hearts, are listed in Galatians 5:22, namely, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance" (i.e. self-control). The children of the kingdom will reveal these qualities as the evidence that they have known the Son of God.

## **OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND.**

The prophets used metaphors and similes in order to emphasise and make vivid their message. The ideas of God sowing and of the hearts of men being like soil, form one of the thematic metaphors of the prophecy of Hosea: refer the following verses, noting that the name Jezreel means “God sows”—Hosea 1:11; 2:22-23; 8:7; 10:12. The same ideas are found elsewhere (e.g. Isa. 55:10), while Jeremiah with the same import in mind as the Lord, says to Israel, “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns” (Jer. 4:3).

## **CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS.**

The parable is an analysis of the results of preaching, reflecting what the passing of time would reveal in the experience of Jesus. His hearers were being “classified” by their reaction to him. So far as the twelve were concerned, the parable must have tempered the enthusiasm they must have had when they saw the initial response of the people to Christ. We, like them, are thus prevented from having deep disappointment when we come to realise that all men will not hear. Moreover, we are made to contemplate which group we belong to and this should improve our attitude.

1

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Evil influences, internal and external, can snatch the Word away before it has time to germinate (“wayside”).
- The shallow-minded fail in tribulation because their convictions are only superficial (“stony ground”).
- A heart that would serve God while at the same time seeking worldly fame and wealth will be choked by the weeds and yield no fruit (“thorny ground”).
- Our hearts must be prepared like good ground and then the Word will flourish to the glory of God and to our salvation.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“Parables of the Messiah” (J. Carter)—Nos. 27 and 28  
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Pages 216-218

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What made Jesus turn to speaking in parables?*
2. *What lessons are we taught by the stony ground and the thorny ground in the parable of the Sower?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

- 1. What is a parable? Why did Jesus speak in parables?*
- 2. In the parable of the Sower, the seed lodged on four types of soil. Describe what each type represents and how the seed responded.*
- 3. Explain the meaning of the parable of the Sower. Make special mention of those things which could stop our "growth" in the Truth.*

## 12. FEEDING THE MULTITUDE

“I am the Bread of Life”

*Five thousand people were fed by the Lord Jesus Christ on the eastern shores of Galilee. He did not provide this food merely to satisfy their hunger; there was a deeper spiritual meaning which he impressed upon his disciples and his audience: he was the bread of life. Those who could perceive the intent of his words and accept him as their saviour would at length partake of eternal life.*

*Our aim in this lesson is to see that only by coming to Jesus Christ and accepting his teaching can we have a hope of life when he returns.*

### **John 6:1-14; Mark 6:31-44**

#### **COME YE YOURSELVES APART (Mk. 6:31-34).**

Two years had passed in the ministry of the Lord Jesus and his popularity was approaching its peak. The ever-present multitude with mixed desires and needs was a constant drain upon the resources of the Master. The disciples had returned from their preaching effort and were anxious to report the wonderful things that had been accomplished (Mk. 6:12, 13, 30). At this time also news of the death of John Baptist, the Lord's great forerunner and cousin, reached him. It became evident that a respite from the crowds and excitement of events was necessary, so that Jesus could commune with his disciples and build up their spiritual preception for events still to come. “Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while”, he said to them. So they took ship and departed for the opposite shores of the Sea of Galilee. The multitude noted their departure however, and followed around the northern shore, until they came upon Jesus and his disciples. Others from neighbouring towns joined the multitude until numbers had swollen to five thousand (v.33). Thus the Lord's privacy was invaded.

They had come because they were impressed by his miracles of healing (Jn. 6:2), but they were oblivious of THEIR greatest needs. The Lord was touched by their determination. He saw them “as sheep having no shepherd” (v.34), and Mark poignantly expresses his reaction: “Jesus was moved with compassion toward them”. Great and pressing though his personal needs were, he showed the qualities of a true shepherd when he put his needs aside for the sake of others. There was no-one else the people could turn to, for the synagogues and Temple were presided over by men filled with self-interest and who oppressed the poor and needy.

So he began to teach them many things, providing them with that spiritual food and drink which could restore them eternally (cp. Psa. 23:2-3; Ezek. 34:23-24; Jn. 10:11; Lk. 9:11).

### **FEEDING THE FIVE THOUSAND (Jn. 6:5-14).**

He taught and healed them hour after hour until evening was almost upon them (Lk. 9:12). They had not eaten and the disciples thought they had to do the practical thinking for their master. How wrong they were in thinking they knew better than he. They called upon the Lord to quickly dismiss the people so they could buy bread in the neighbourhood (Mk. 6:36). But the Lord was cognisant of the crisis which had developed, and he was loathe to send away people intent upon his words. He answered the disciples: "Give ye them to eat". They failed to comprehend the greatness of the Son of God in their midst, and began to calculate how much money would be necessary for them to feed so vast a throng. How far short these practical men fell in practice, even though they had so recently recounted what they had been able to do (Mk. 6:30). They reasoned that there was no way of providing bread apart from a vast expenditure, and they had so very little in their purse (Mk. 10:28).

The Lord asked how many loaves they had, and told them to go and find out (Mk. 6:38). It was Andrew who came back with the answer. "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" (Jn. 6:9). The scene was now set for one of the most notable of the Lord's miracles. He directed the disciples to seat the crowd in companies of hundreds and fifties upon the green grass. As evening came on, five thousand men and women witnessed the Son of God take the loaves and fishes, look up to heaven and bless and break the loaves and give them to his waiting disciples to set before them. He also divided the two fishes and multiplied them for all to partake of. The result is summarised: "And they did all eat and were filled" (Mk. 6:42). Imagine the amazement of the assembly. When they had eaten "as much as they would", the Lord told the disciples to gather up the fragments that remain, "that nothing be lost". Twelve baskets of fragments were gathered. Such conviction was wrought in those present that they said, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world" (Jn. 6:14). They were convinced that he was the great prophet whom Moses had declared would be raised up from among their brethren (Deut. 18:15-18).

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGN (Jn. 6:30-40, 47-58).**

One year later, at the time of the next Passover, Jesus again took bread and blessed, and brake it, and gave to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: this is my body" (Mk. 14:22). He used the identical language and this provides us with the key to unlock the true significance of the feeding of the five thousand: he was teaching that by the breaking of his own body in death he would provide true bread which would sustain many unto life eternal. The same teaching underlies the Lord's supper where his death is remembered in the partaking of the bread.

As the five loaves were distributed among five thousand, so the grace of God has abounded through Christ unto a vast multitude (Rev. 7:9; Rom. 5:15). They shall be redeemed from among men and shall not hunger or thirst anymore, for the Son of God shall gather them as his sheep and shall feed them and lead them to living fountains of water (Rev. 7:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4).

These principles were taught to the people on the following day when they found him at the synagogue in Capernaum on the other side of the lake. Tragically they had not learned the true significance of the miracle, for they were just seeking further satisfaction of their hunger. Jesus rebuked them: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you" (Jn. 6:27; cp. Isa. 55:1-3).

He identified himself as the true bread: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (v.35). The distribution of the loaves was an enacted parable foreshadowing the giving of his flesh for the life of the world (v.51). Failure to discern him as the true bread from heaven would be fraught with dire consequences: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (v.53).

### THE FRAGMENTS.

After feeding the multitude the Lord had told the disciples to gather up the fragments, "that nothing be lost". In his explanatory discourse the next day the Lord uttered words which charged this request with meaning. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (v.39; cp. 17:12). The immensity of the mind of the Lord, as he performed that miracle on the shores of Galilee can now be perceived: he saw the event as pre-figuring his own death one year hence. He saw that through the provision of this bread, life would be given not only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but also to the Gentiles — none of the fragments must be lost — for those crumbs would provide sustenance for the Gentiles (Mk. 7:28; refer Lesson 13). In his speech he repeatedly emphasised that the True Bread would be available to "all", or "the world" (vv.33, 39, 40, 51). John's gospel lays great stress on this inclusion of the Gentiles in the hope of Israel through faith in Jesus Christ (cp. 3:15, 16; 4:23; 12:32; 20:31).

It is significant that a short while later in the same semi-Gentile territory of Decapolis he repeated the miracle, when four thousand men, besides woman and children, were present (Mk. 8:1-9; Matt. 15:38). His words and actions were almost the same — the Lord was teaching that "other sheep", the Gentiles, would yet come into the hope of Israel.

The fact that there were **twelve** baskets of fragments gathered up emphasises the Israelitish character of the hope. Gentiles may be

saved but only by becoming the “Israel of God” through faith (cp. Eph. 2:12; Jn. 4:22; Gal. 6:16).

### **A GREATER THAN MOSES.**

In all of Israel’s history only one event could be compared to Jesus’ miracle. By the hand of Moses God had fed, not 5,000 for one day, but a whole nation in the deserts of Sinai for 40 years. The people were quick to make the comparison. Initially they had declared him to be the prophet promised by Moses, and had even sought to take him by force to make him king (Jn. 6:14-15). Now when he rebuked their motive for seeking him, they required a sign from him to prove his authority, saying that Moses was vindicated by giving their fathers bread from heaven! Their slighting comparison only emphasised their own shortcomings. **God** had in fact given their fathers bread in the desert, not Moses; and the true analogy was not so much between Moses and Jesus, but between the manna, which was God-given, and Jesus, the Son whom God sent into the world (v.39). He was the true bread because he would give life eternal (whereas the wilderness generation which ate manna were dead, v.49); and **the world** and not just **one** generation of **one** nation would benefit: “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” (v.33). Truly a greater than Moses had come!

### **POPULARITY WANES (Jn. 6:59-69).**

The discourse was not well received by the majority of the crowd. They had come to Jesus for more food and excitement, but Jesus had instructed them and appealed to their understanding and motives when he made the statement, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you” (Jn. 6:52, 60-61). This statement was repugnant to the Jews for the Law forbade the eating of blood (Lev. 17:10). They took him literally, and their Jewish sensitivities were aroused. Jesus clarified his meaning: he was not referring to his literal flesh and blood, for the “flesh profits nothing” (v.63); they must take in and digest his words, purpose and teachings: “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life”. “Hear”, said Isaiah, “and your soul shall live” (55:3).

From that time forward many of his disciples left him (v.66). The pinnacle of his popularity had passed. Even among the twelve there were some misgivings. The previous night Jesus had walked on the water as they rowed across the lake towards Capernaum. He had calmed their troubled hearts with the words: “It is I; be not afraid” (Jn. 6:20), but even they found it hard to believe it was Jesus, for they “considered not the miracle of the loaves, for their heart was hardened” (Mk. 6:52). Twice within 24 hours they had seen the power of the Creator. Now the question came from Jesus, “Will ye also go away?”

Peter was quick to reply, “Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God” (vv.68-69).



**LESSONS FOR US:**

- Like our Lord we must not dismiss men but draw them to the Gospel, showing kindness and compassion as good shepherds.
- Christ is the true bread from heaven; outside him death reigns, for to no-one else can we turn for “the words of eternal life”.
- Only by careful study of the words of Jesus shall we see and appreciate his meaning.
- Christ’s death is memorialised in the partaking of the Lord’s Supper, even as the feeding of the multitude foreshadowed it.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

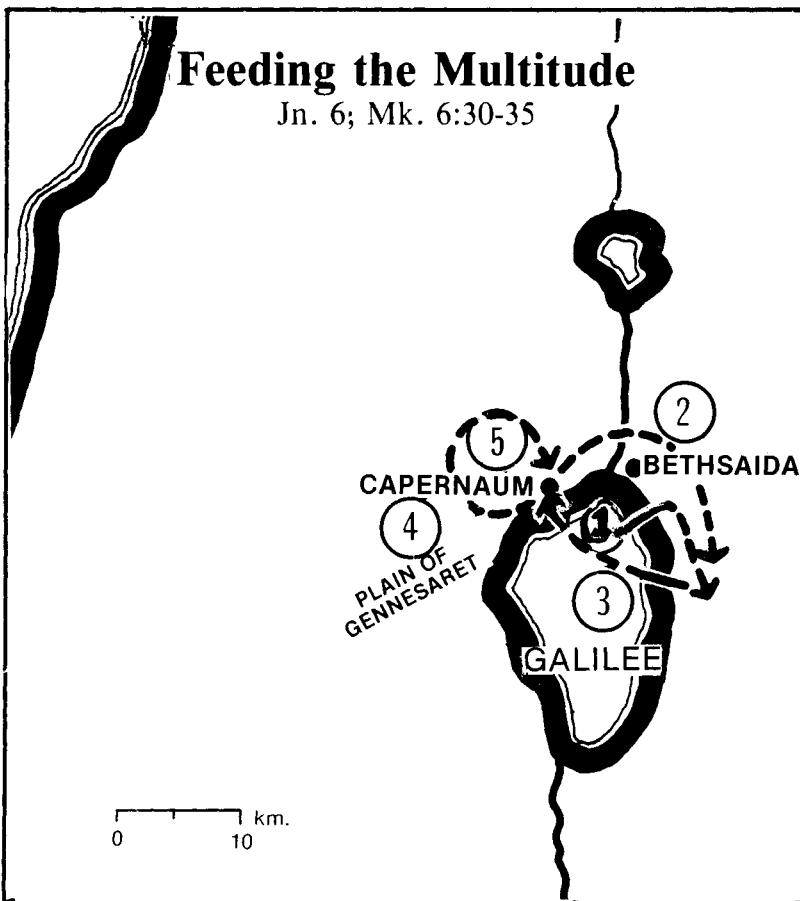
“Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Chapter 6  
“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 9, Pages 113-131

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Why did Jesus seek to take the disciples apart into a desert place prior to the feeding of the 5,000?*
2. *Tell why the loyalty of Jesus’ followers waned when he spoke to them in the synagogue in Capernaum on the day after feeding the 5,000.*
3. *“I am the Bread of Life”, said Jesus Christ in the discourse that followed the feeding of the 5,000. Show how this thought developed out of the miracle.*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Recount the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. What is the spiritual significance of this miracle?*
2. *Why did a number of those amongst the 5,000 whom Jesus fed seek for him the next day? How did they compare him with Moses and what was his response?*
3. *“Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life”. When did Peter say these words to Jesus and what led up to them? What lesson do we learn from this incident?*



1. The twelve return from their preaching effort and news of John's death reaches Jesus. Hence they decide to go across the lake to the desert near Bethsaida (Mk. 6:16, 30-31).
2. The multitude follows around the top of the lake (Mk. 6:32-33).
3. After the feeding of the 5,000 the twelve set out across the lake. The Lord walks to them on the water (Jn. 6:15-21). They reach Capernaum.
4. The Lord heals many in the land of Gennesaret (Mk. 6:53-56).
5. He delivers his speech on the bread of life in the synagogue at Capernaum (Jn. 6:59).

The incidents of Lesson 13 follow immediately.

### 13. DEFILEMENT AND HYPOCRISY

**“That which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man”**

*The height of the Lord's popularity had been reached in the feeding of the 5,000. Then came the turning point with his speech in Capernaum which offended many of his disciples so that they walked no more with him. In the wake of this incident the forces of opposition began to stir.*

*A deputation of the Scribes and Pharisees came to Jesus on the issue of defilement through failure to wash hands. Jesus rebuffed them as hypocrites, pointing out that defilement arises from a failure to wash hearts and minds.*

*The rejection of Jesus by the Jews proved to be the riches of the Gentiles, for Jesus was thereby driven further north to the borders of Tyre and Sidon where he found a faithful Gentile woman. Returning to Galilee he found Gentiles who glorified the God of Israel and who in a crowd of 4,000, received bread from heaven.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that human tradition can stifle the claims of God's commandments and that defilement has its source in the human heart.*

#### **Matthew 15:1-31**

##### **A CONTEST OF RELIGIONS (Matt. 15:1).**

The Pharisees had developed a religion centred upon formalities. Though their way of life was founded upon the Law of Moses and the standards of moral conduct which they set were generally high (Matt. 23:3), they had nevertheless neglected the very force behind the Law — “thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mk. 12:30). They were so pre-occupied with all kinds of external rules and regulations that these had become religion itself.

To the mind of the Pharisee this approach had “advantages”; it made “religion” easier to observe, and, more importantly, it made it simpler to check up on the failings of others (as the Pharisees saw them) including the Lord Jesus Christ!

The issue was joined as Scribes and Pharisees who had been sent from Jerusalem confronted Jesus: “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?” It was a contest of religions in which there could be no compromise. Either the demands of God consist of obedience to external rules and regulations, with no regard to the thoughts and intents of the heart, or else they consist of obedience springing from hearts and minds centred upon Divine ideals.

##### **THE TRADITIONS OF THE ELDERS (Matt. 15:2).**

The Pharisees felt they had a water-tight case against Jesus: “Thy

disciples wash not their hands when they eat bread". Jesus had just fed 5,000 in the desert (Matt. 14:20, 21). They could not have followed the Pharisees' manner of washing, namely, carefully holding their hands upwards after washing so that the whole hand might be covered to the wrist and so that the water contaminated by the washing might not run down the fingers again and pollute them.

By concentrating on such trivialities, the Pharisees had obscured the weightier issues of the Law, justice, mercy and faith (Matt. 23:23-24). They were scrupulously clean with their crockery, but were unconcerned that the food which they ate from that crockery had been obtained by craft and fraud (Mk. 7:4).

### **OBEDIENCE STIFLED BY TRADITION (Matt. 15:3-9).**

Jesus stopped neither to justify nor apologise for his disciples. Instead he turned the issue back upon the Scribes and Pharisees: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?" There was a great contrast between "traditions of men" and "commandments of God". But not only did the traditions of men set aside the commandments of God, they over-rode them in order to satisfy men's selfish desires.

Jesus gave an illustration of how the tradition of the elders contradicted the Law of God. God commanded that father and mother be honoured in deeds as well as words, so that, in time of need, they should be helped materially. Further, the Law threatened severe punishment against those who despised or spoke with contempt against their parents — principles as applicable today as in the time of Moses (Prov. 20:20; 30:17; Eph. 6:2). Yet the tradition of the elders released a man from these obligations if he gave generously to the Temple treasury (Corban). Thus the commandment of God was nullified by the tradition of men (v.6). Jesus called the Pharisees "hypocrites", for whilst they pretended to be worshippers of God, they really put first the traditions of men.

Isaiah prophesied of such a class of people, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (29:13).

### **DEFILEMENT AND ITS SOURCE (Matt. 15:10-20).**

Jesus then turned and called the wondering multitude to him, declaring, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man". The Scribes were fundamentally wrong. They reasoned that outward observances would cleanse the inner man. But Jesus set the record straight — there was little point in abstaining from unclean meats if actions are not in keeping with the principle demonstrated. The Law of God is designed to transform the heart and thereby affect the thoughts, words and deeds which issue from the heart.

But some of Jesus' disciples were not concentrating upon his teaching. They were more worried about the effect of his forthright approach. After all, the Pharisees were powerful and dangerous opponents. So, perhaps with a tone of censure in their voice, they warned Jesus, "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended?" They wanted the Truth he spoke to be modified so as to be "respectable" in the eyes of the world. But this can never be achieved. In the final analysis it would be the Pharisee, not Jesus, who would be overthrown: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Even the closest disciples were baffled. On returning to the house they sought enlightenment. The explanation was simple but fundamental. Whatever goes into a man from outside goes straight to the stomach, bypassing the heart. All foods then are clean, for how can they affect a man's thinking?

The source of defilement is within man himself. The human heart (which, in the Hebrew idiom, was the seat of the intellect) is prone to sin. Unenlightened by God's word, it will spontaneously produce thoughts which lead to sinful actions. Jeremiah terms it "desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Man does not need an external devil to entice him to sin; his own lust causes that (James 1:14-15).

Jesus then outlined those things hidden in the heart. The heart is the source of "murders" and, furthermore the source of all thoughts which, given opportunity of development, would lead to murder. "Adultery" and "fornication" are both mentioned. Adultery involves a breach of a sacred covenant made with one's marriage partner; fornication equally involves unfaithfulness to a future marriage partner; and both are classed as a sin against God (Gen. 39:9; Psa. 51:4, cp. title). Thus all forms of sexual vice and laxity are covered. "Thefts" include robbing God as well as fellow man. "False witness" is pulling down the reputation of another. "Blasphemies" are an affront against the majesty of God.

And so the evils of the heart go on. Mark, in his parallel account, includes a much fuller list (Mk. 7:21-22). It is notable that in his catalogue of sins Jesus includes thoughts, words and deeds. Sin is then defiance of the Laws of God in thought, word or deed. A man is defiled by these things, not by eating with "unwashed hands".

### **THE FAITH OF A GENTILE WOMAN (Matt. 15:21-28).**

The clash with the Scribes and Pharisees had a remarkable sequel. The danger which now threatened Jesus caused him to withdraw northward to the borders of Tyre and Sidon. This was a Gentile area and considered "defiled". No Pharisee or Scribe would be found there.

But to Jesus, Tyre and Sidon were no worse than Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matt. 11:21). By his actions Jesus abolished the distinction

that existed between people as his words had abolished the distinction between foods.

Meanwhile a distressed Syro-Phoenician woman was pestering Jesus. Her daughter was grievously sick. Her only hope lay with Jesus. She flung herself at his feet: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David".

But there was no response. NO word of comfort was uttered.

"Send her away" was the advice of the impatient disciples. They echoed the thoughts of the Pharisees; she was of an unclean nation (Deut. 7:1-2).

To Jesus there was no such separation. Faith, not the accident of birth, makes a person acceptable with God. Yet her faith needed refining — she needed to appreciate her relationship to Israel: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel", Jesus said.

She persisted with a desperate plea, "Lord, help me". It was a cry for salvation, but salvation is only "of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22). "It is not meet to take the children's (Israel's) bread, and to cast it to the dogs (the Gentiles)". The woman grasped at the opportunity Jesus' words afforded: "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table". Her words were so apt, perhaps even more than she realised. The "children" had recently refused the "bread of life" (Jn. 6). Jesus had been driven to the very border of the "table". And the "crumbs" had fallen to the Gentile woman at his feet.

Jesus was touched by her response: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt". By faith and not by the works of the Law this "woman of Canaan" found acceptance in the eyes of God (cp. Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 14:27). And over the border, in a despised Gentile land, a little girl felt strength and vitality flow back into her body.

### **RETURN TO DECAPOLIS (Matt. 15:29-31).**

From the borders of Tyre and Sidon, Jesus led his small band of disciples back to the eastern shores of Galilee, in the area of Decapolis, a part of the land dominated by the Gentiles: "Galilee of the nations", Isaiah had called it (9:1).

There on a mountain was a scene which would have disgusted the Pharisees but thrilled those who knew that discipleship depended upon the thoughts of the heart, not upon race or ritual. For on the mountain a "great multitude" of Gentiles "cast themselves down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them".

The contrast was graphic. Those in Israel who could walk, see and speak turned their backs upon Jesus: but the "lame, blind, dumb and maimed" Gentiles struggled to the top of a mountain to come to Jesus. There they worshipped "the God of Israel".

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- We must not view the Truth as a series of laws by which we can judge others.
- Rather the Truth must affect the motives of our hearts and find expression in words and actions in accordance with the commandments of God.
- If the heart of man is not controlled by the Law of God, it is the source of every imaginable evil.
- Outward appearance, race or colour are of no consequence in the eyes of God—the bread of life is available to all.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

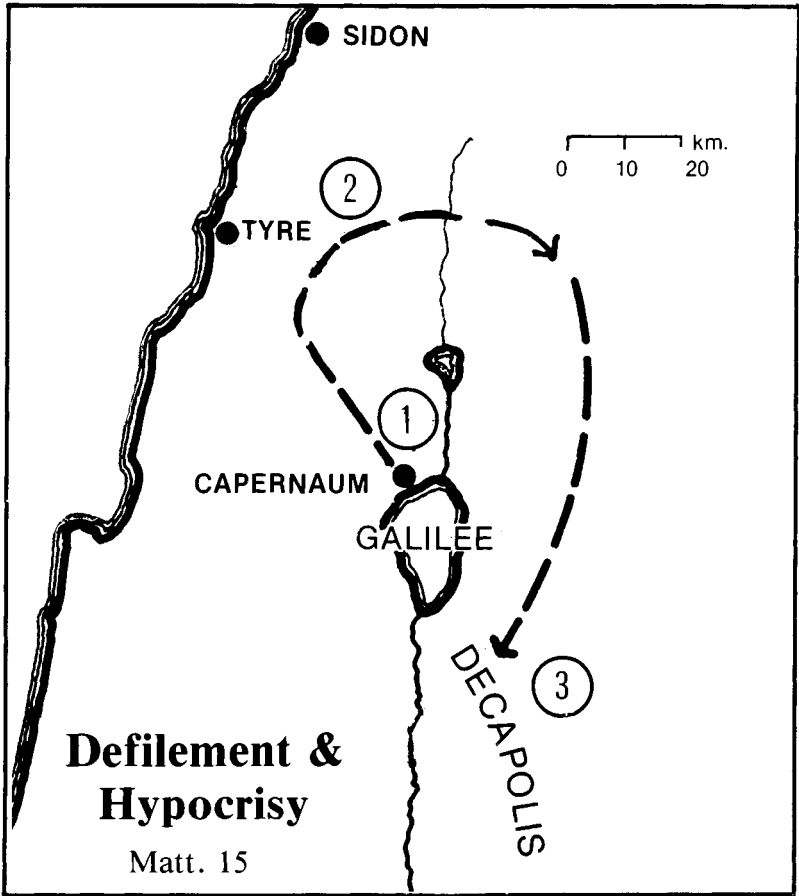
“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 5, Chapters 4 and 5  
“The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Part IV, Chs. 2, 3

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What did Jesus say about the human heart when he taught about the source of defilement?*
2. *How was the commandment “Honour thy father and thy mother” annulled by the “tradition of the elders”?*
3. *Upon what basis was the Canaanite woman’s request to Jesus answered? What did Jesus say?*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *In what way did the “tradition of the elders” contradict the commandments of God? Give an example.*
2. *Jesus showed the Pharisees that their ideas concerning defilement were wrong. Explain what he taught about defilement and the source of sin.*
3. *Describe what happened when Jesus was approached by “a woman of Canaan” when he was in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*



1. In Capernaum the Lord was confronted by a deputation of Scribes and Pharisees and was questioned about his breach of the tradition of the elders (Matt. 15:1-21).
  2. Then he departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon where the Syro-Phoenician woman approached him and her daughter was healed.
  3. He returned to Decapolis where he fed the 4,000.
- The incidents of Lesson 14 follow immediately.



## 14. OPPOSITION GATHERS IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

**“He must go up to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . . and be killed”**

*The Lord’s final year was one of increasing bitterness as he pursued the pathway that was to lead to his death. The pressures of opposition were building up against him as we see him “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”.*

*Yet, to the forefront, was his concern for his disciples, his desire to instruct and thus equip them for the sacrifices they also would be required to make. It is an example of selflessness that should inspire our own service.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that sufferings must come before reward — for Messiah as well as disciple.*

### Matthew 16

#### THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES DEMAND A SIGN (Matt. 16:1-4).

It had been some time since Jesus came across the Pharisees. He had left them following the discussion on defilement (Matt. 15), and travelled north, far from their influence, and then to the Gentile area of Decapolis on the eastern shore of Galilee.

Hardly had he crossed the lake to the familiar western shore than he was challenged by a deputation of Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 15:39; 16:1). After his exhilarating experiences with the Gentiles, the approach of this group signalled to the Lord that his final period of opposition was about to begin. From now on he would be walking in the shadow of the cross.

The presence of the Sadducees so far from Jerusalem was an indication of the concern with which Jesus was looked upon. Further, the Sadducees were not usually found in company of the Pharisees (cp. Acts 23:7), but like Herod and Pilate, they could become friends when there was work in which their common animosity could be gratified.

They demanded of Jesus a sign from heaven that would serve to authenticate his mission among them. On the surface this seemed a reasonable demand. Had not Moses given such a sign (Ex. 4:1-9)? So also had Joshua (Josh. 10:12-14), Samuel (1 Sam. 12:16-18), and Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:1).

But what sign could be of any significance to those who dismissed such signs as healing the sick, raising the dead, restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf (cp. Matt. 11:4-5)? What sign could be given to the self-centred Pharisee who did not see the cleansing of the heart as a pre-requisite to holiness or to the materialistic Sadducee who rejected the very concept of resurrection? These men were

hypocrites, tempting the Lord.

As on previous similar occasions, Jesus refused their request (Jn. 2:18; 6:30; Matt. 12:38). Instead they would receive “the sign of the prophet Jonah”.

### **THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH (Refer Stage 3 Notes, Lesson 13).**

The words of Jesus recalled the message and ministry of Jonah. After a typical resurrection from the dead, he gave the people of Nineveh but 40 days to repent or else destruction would fall on their city. The Ninevites had repented and the threatened punishment was averted. But Jesus, by decrying his generation as “wicked and adulterous”, implied that there would be no repentance and therefore punishment would come.

The signs were obvious if only the Pharisees and Sadducees would open their eyes to them. They looked unto the heavens in the morning and the evening and from the colour of the sky they could discern the approaching weather. Could they not lift up their eyes and see the signs of a coming storm?

Their present mission was an omen! Jesus said that no sign would be given them “but the sign of the prophet Jonas”. This was the sign of his resurrection after 3 days (Matt. 12:40). But it would come after his sacrifice at their hands! It would therefore seal their fate and come too late for many.

“If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:30-31). They remained obstinately unrepentant and in 40 years Roman armies dyed the land and sea with Jewish blood.

Jesus “left them and departed”. The opportunity had been lost. Jesus was not going to press divine mercy upon a people who did not want it.

### **THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES (Matt. 16:5-12).**

The small party left Magdala so abruptly that the disciples forgot to procure bread. When they reached the other side Jesus warned them of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He had been contemplating where the hatred of his enemies would lead and he knew that even one of his own disciples would be influenced against him. But, as so often happened, they misunderstood him and it had to be explained that what concerned him was not “the leaven of bread, but the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees”.

As leaven insidiously pervades the dough until the whole mass is affected, so opposition to Jesus was being spread by his enemies throughout the nation.

But what exactly did Jesus mean by “the leaven of the Pharisees

and of the Sadducees". He spoke not of the leaven of each, but the leaven common to both. They were very different parties.

- The leaven of the Pharisees was hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). They were strict, intensely nationalistic and were preoccupied with the ritual of the Law. This they performed like a theatrical display, to be "seen of men". Their hearts centred on the praise of men and not the praise of God (Matt. 5:5; Jn. 5:44).
- The leaven of the Sadducees was materialism. They were lax in their religion and sympathetic to outside culture, philosophy and worldly practices. They did not believe in the resurrection or future reward and so were engrossed in present gain. Unabashed they accepted the offerings of the Temple treasury.

Though Pharisees and Sadducees differed, they had nevertheless joined in hostility to Jesus and had sought a sign of him. Thus they both belonged to "a wicked and adulterous generation". This is the key to the leaven common to both. Jesus represented the things of God. They were ungodly, alive to self and dead to God. The lesson for us is that this leaven still permeates — neither hypocrisy nor materialism are extinct. They unite in the baser leaven of ungodliness which can fill our lives and take us away from Christ.

### **THE GREAT CONFESSION (Matt. 16:13-16).**

From Galilee the Lord led his disciples northward towards Caesarea Philippi. Now he must prepare his disciples for his suffering and death. In the quietness of the well-watered mountain retreat he asked them, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" Their answer revealed a decline in the public's estimation of him. At one time they had no doubt that he was the Messiah (cp. Jn. 6:14-15), but the disciples' answer showed that he had failed to fit the peoples' conception of Messiah—the steady opposition had changed their opinion and they had relegated him to "one of the prophets" (v.14).

But the Lord's enquiry was only important in-as-much as it led to the supreme enquiry, "But whom say ye that I am?" (v.15).

It was Peter who replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God". This was a moment of exaltation for Jesus. In spite of all that had happened to discredit Jesus, Peter knew that he was the Messiah. Jesus commended him, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in heaven" (v.17).

"Thou art Simon Bar-jona" described Peter's earthly descent—the fact that he described Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," showed God was at work in Peter's life—he had been born of God (Jn. 1:13).

In verse 18 Jesus continued and said, "And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter ('Petros') and upon this rock ('petra') will I build my ecclesia, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it". In his

confession Peter had justified his Lord's choice of a new name for him (Jn. 1:42). It was Peter who described in his epistle the ecclesia as a spiritual house built upon the chief corner stone, the Lord Jesus (1 Pet. 2:5-6).

For the first time in the gospels Jesus used the word "ecclesia" of his followers, as distinct from the Jewish synagogues. So in that moment, at a point far removed from the Temple and ritual of Jerusalem, the rejected leader with his little group of exiles proclaimed the ultimate victory of his ecclesia—"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The Lord indicated to Peter that he would be given "the keys of the Kingdom" and that his decisions made in faith would receive God's endorsement — a power that was later conveyed to the apostles as a whole (Matt. 18:18).

The key was a badge of office or authority (Isa. 22:22), for the person possessing the key controlled access to the building. It was said in condemnation of the scribes that they had "taken away the key of knowledge" (Luke 11:52). "The keys of the kingdom" therefore describe the power to open up to man's understanding the true position held by the Lord Jesus Christ, by which an entrance into the kingdom of God might be attained.

But Peter had a special role in the use of the keys. Jesus called him "Simon Bar-jonah" or Simon, son of Jonah. It was as if the mantle of the great prophet Jonah had fallen upon Peter's shoulders. It would be his to unlock the gospel to the Jews (as he did by proclaiming salvation in the name of Jesus Christ—Acts 2 and 3), and after an initial reluctance owing to a failure in understanding, to open the door of faith to the Gentiles (in the call of Cornelius—Acts 10).

#### **INSTRUCTION IN THE WAY OF THE CROSS (Matt. 16:20-27).**

Upon the basis of Peter's confession Jesus was able to show them the nature of his Messiahship and where it would lead him: "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised again the third day." Sufferings were not a disqualification of his Messiahship but the proof of it: "Messiah the Prince" would be "cut off" (Dan. 9:25-26).

It was Jesus' use of such strong words ("must . . . suffer . . . be killed") that elicited Peter's response. The revelation of a suffering and rejected Messiah was too much. His love for his Lord was too great to accept this terrible picture of persecution and death. He objected, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee". But his love was a stumbling block to himself and his Lord. Jesus could endure the hatred of his enemies better than the misguided love of his friends. He repudiated the temptation that Peter had placed before him, using the identical words he had spoken to the tempter when he had placed the same trial before him, "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” (v. 23; cp. Matt. 4:8-10).

Jesus’ death was essential if he was to “fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15; refer Lesson 2); it was the culminating act of obedience (Phil. 2:8-9). Without the cross there would be no crown—if he did not suffer there would be no glory.

Jesus used Peter’s lapse to show the disciples their part in the purpose of God. The cross which had forced a cry from Peter’s lips would be the lot of the disciple, too! “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (v.24). Their life as men who followed him must be a life of sacrifice, denying the desires of the flesh and savouring only the things of God. He had come to give life. Accepting this gift meant losing many of the glittering prizes the world had to offer.

But Jesus continued: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” From the “losses” incurred in this life, as a result of service to Christ, will eventually emerge a life of far greater value than the present conquest of the world (v.26). Those whose lives are filled with pleasure-seeking and self-indulgence will eventually lose all.

In his last words Jesus puts their Messianic expectations in the right perspective. They had been right to expect a king who would come with power to redeem Israel. But sufferings must come before the reward—for them as for him. These words apply as much to us today as they did then.

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The signs we can see in the world of the coming overthrow of this civilisation are as clear as the signs which the Pharisees and Sadducees saw, yet ignored. It is our part to discern.
- The leaven of the Pharisees (hypocrisy) and the leaven of the Sadducees (materialism) are not extinct and combine to form the baser leaven of ungodliness which can alienate us from Christ.
- The confession that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” is the foundation upon which the ecclesia is built.
- As Messiahship involved suffering, so discipleship must involve sacrifice.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 5, Chapters 6-8
- “The Gospel of the Son of God” (L. G. Sargent)—Part IV, Chapters 3-4
- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 9, Pages 149-166

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

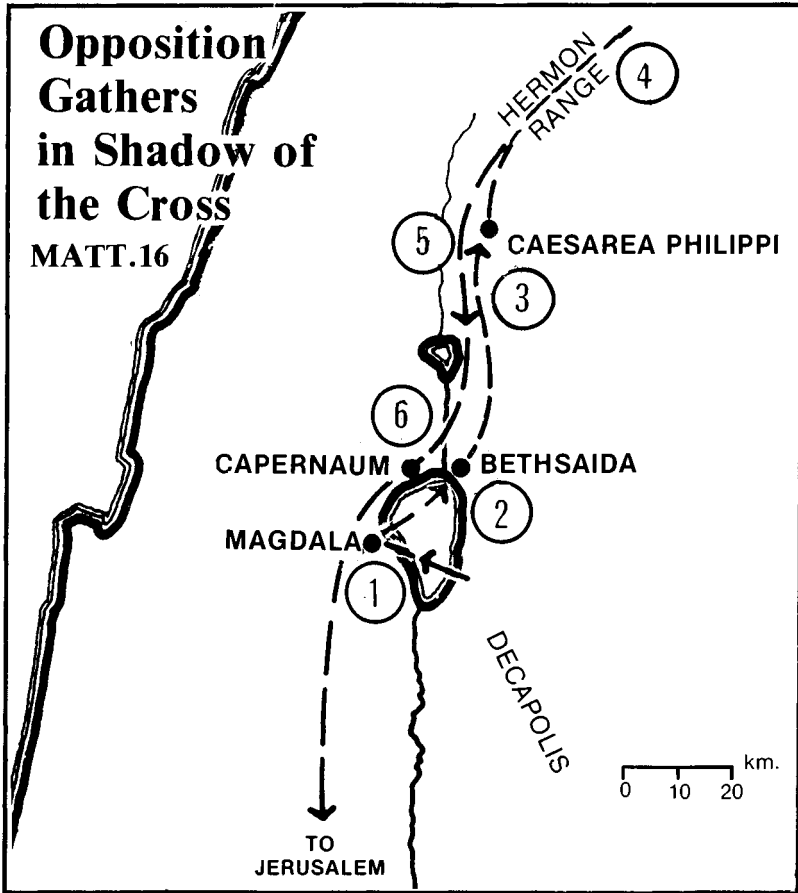
1. *What was wrong in the Pharisees and Sadducees asking Jesus for a sign when they met him at Magdala?*
2. *What is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees of which Jesus bade his disciples beware?*
3. *Why was Peter's confession so important to Jesus?*
4. *What did Jesus mean when he said, "Whosoever shall save his life shall lose it" (Matt. 16:25)?*
5. *Why did Jesus have to die in order to become the Messiah?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Relate the incident when Peter gave his great confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". Why were these words so important? In what way did Peter use the keys of the kingdom?*
2. *How did Jesus prepare his disciples when faced with growing opposition and his own impending death?*
3. *Tell the story of Peter's confession and explain Jesus' words of commendation.*
4. *Why did Jesus say to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:23)?*

# Opposition Gathers in Shadow of the Cross

MATT.16



1. After feeding the 4,000, Jesus and his disciples crossed the lake and landed at Magdala (Dalmanutha). There he was confronted by Pharisees and Sadducees seeking a sign (Matt. 15:29; 16:1-5).
2. They left by ship for Bethsaida where he healed a blind man (Mk. 8:22).
3. At Caesarea Philippi, Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:13).
4. Jesus was transfigured on a high mountain near Hermon (Matt. 17:1; Mk. 9:2).
5. Jesus healed an epileptic boy near Caesarea Philippi (Mk. 9:14-29). He returned through Galilee to Capernaum (Mk. 9:30, 33).
6. At Capernaum he provided tribute money, warned the disciples who were arguing who was the greatest, and taught the importance of forgiveness (Matt. 17:24-27; 18:1-35; See Lesson 15).

## 15. JESUS IS TRANSFIGURED

**“This is my beloved Son: hear him”**

*At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus put the disciples' Messianic expectations in their right perspective. It was true that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. But this also meant that he must suffer before attaining the glory of the kingdom. Jesus' disciples did not understand this and so Jesus from this time emphasised that the cross must come before the crown.*

*The disciples were disillusioned to hear that he must suffer many things and that their hope that he would soon redeem Israel lay well in the future. But although they were wrong, a privileged few were to receive a foretaste of that kingdom: “Verily I say unto you that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power (Mk. 9:1).*

*The aim of this lesson is to see how the transfiguration helped Jesus endure the cross, and how a clear vision of the Kingdom of God will help us also to overcome the world.*

### **Mark 9:1-32**

#### **JESUS TAKES THREE DISCIPLES INTO THE MOUNT.**

Jesus told the disciples that there were some among them who would not die till they had seen the kingdom of God come with power. What did he mean? In the three gospels where this statement occurs, the Transfiguration follows immediately after. We are therefore not left in any doubt as to what Jesus was referring. Peter's later account of the incident confirms that the transfiguration of Jesus was a foretaste of the “power and coming” of the Lord (2 Pet. 1:16-18).

We read that Jesus took Peter, James and John with him into a high mountain apart by themselves (Mk. 9:2). These three disciples had been privileged to be with Jesus on the occasion of his greatest miracle to date and would later share with him his deepest sorrows (Mk. 14:33). We are not told the mountain to which Jesus and his disciples went. The district of Caesarea Philippi is very mountainous, lying at the foot of the Lebanon range and nearby there were many solitary mountains suitable for the purpose in hand. Jesus knew what was to transpire on the mount, and Luke tells us that once on the mountain he began to pray (Lk. 9:28). By this means he maintained that wonderful unity of thought with his Father. Perhaps, too, he prayed for his disciples. He had brought them to the mountain as witnesses, so that they might be strengthened to carry on the work after his ascension. But while their Lord prayed, they became weary and with night now upon them they fell asleep (Lk. 9:32).



### **JESUS IS TRANSFIGURED (Mk. 9:2-3).**

Jesus continued in prayer and as he was praying a remarkable thing happened. Mark tells us he was transfigured (Mk. 9:2). The Greek word translated “transfigured”, is “metamorphoo” meaning “a change of form” or a “metamorphosis”. By combining the three gospel records we learn that Jesus’ raiment became “exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them”, shining and glistening. The fashion of Jesus’ countenance also changed and shone as the sun (Matt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3; Lk. 9:29).

These terms are used elsewhere to describe the glory of an immortal being. Daniel describes those who shall attain unto everlasting life as “shining as the brightness of the firmament” (Dan. 12:3). Jesus earlier had said similar words: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43). Of the angel who rolled back the stone from Jesus’ tomb it was said, “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as the snow” (Matt. 28:3). Thus for a brief period Jesus had a foretaste of that glory and power promised him beyond the cross.

### **MOSES AND ELIJAH APPEAR IN GLORY (Mk. 9:4).**

Moses and Elijah suddenly appeared in glory and spoke with Jesus of his decease (Gk. ‘exodus’) that he would accomplish at Jerusalem (Lk. 9:30-31). The appearance of these two great servants of God, Moses representing the Law and Elijah the prophets, would have been of great encouragement to Jesus as the day of his crucifixion drew near. Both had stood on mount Sinai amidst earthquake and fire and heard Yahweh’s name proclaimed (Ex. 34:4-7; 1 Kgs. 19:8-12). But now they spoke with the very one who was the embodiment of the Law and prophets—the Word made Flesh.

While Jesus, Moses and Elijah were in earnest conversation the disciples awoke. As if to emphasise the surpassing glory of Christ, Luke states: “they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him” (Lk. 9:32). The disciples were soon to learn that Christ’s glory is supreme.

How honoured the three were to see such glory. Truly they had seen “the kingdom of God come with power” as Jesus had said.

### **MOSES AND ELIJAH BEGIN TO DEPART (Mk. 9:5-6).**

The scene was short-lived. Moses and Elijah soon began to depart. Peter, awe-struck and reluctant for this to happen, cried to Jesus, “Master it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said” (Lk. 9:33).

Perhaps Peter thought that the appearance of Jesus in glory with Moses and Elijah was a sign that the kingdom was near at hand. But

when Moses and Elijah departed, his hopes were dashed. In haste, not knowing what he was saying, he suggested that three tabernacles be built in order to retain them — one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Unconsciously he had equated the three. God would soon direct attention to His Beloved Son as the greatest.

But Peter had not fully comprehended the scene. The kingdom would come in God's set time. For the present, they had to appreciate that the glory had to be preceded by the sacrifice of God's Son — he had come to fulfil the Law and prophets.

### **GOD'S DECLARATION (Mk. 9:7-8).**

Whilst Peter was speaking a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice spoke to them from the cloud, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5; Lk. 9:34, 35). When the disciples heard the voice they fell on their faces, greatly afraid. When Jesus came he touched them and said, "Arise, and be not afraid" (Matt. 17:6, 7). When they lifted up their eyes, Jesus alone remained (Matt. 17:8; Mk. 9:8). Moses and Elijah had departed — Jesus was indeed pre-eminent. And had not even Moses spoken of Jesus Christ as the one to whom all should hearken? (Deut. 18:15).

In later years Peter recalled these experiences as proof that they had not followed myths (2 Pet. 1:16-18). The incident had made an indelible impression on the three closest disciples.

### **ELIAS VERILY COMETH FIRST (Mk. 9:9-13).**

On the following day Jesus charged the three that they should "tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). But the statement, "risen from the dead" puzzled them. The disciples seemed to have shared the common view that Messiah should abide for ever (Jn. 12:34). They could not fit death and resurrection into their concept of Messiah. Other questions troubled them. Why had Elijah been present on the mount? Should he not appear before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord?" (Mal. 4:5-6). How could Messiah die after the appearance of Elijah?

So they asked Jesus saying: "Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?" (Mk. 9:11). Jesus said Elijah would indeed come first and "restore all things" before the day of the Lord (Matt. 17:11). But scripture also foretold the sufferings of the Son of Man before that great day.

Jesus explained that, so far as they were concerned, Elijah had already appeared in the person of John the Baptist. John preached "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Lk. 1:17). He preached repentance before the coming of Jesus, and had gone to his death. As they had done to John, so they would do to his Lord (Matt. 17:12).

Thus Jesus did not negate the Scribes' teaching concerning Elijah.

Rather he showed that scripture spoke not only of a forerunner before Christ's return in glory, but also before his suffering and death.

### **DISCORD ON THE PLAIN BENEATH (Mk. 9:14-19).**

Jesus and the disciples descended and found the remaining nine disciples. They were embarrassed because they could not cure a child who was dumb and suffered from violent epileptic fits (Mk. 9:17, 18). The disciples were in the midst of a crowd of people and the Scribes were questioning them, doubtless about their inability to effect a cure. When the people saw Jesus approaching, they ran to him hoping that he could heal him. The Scribes also came to Jesus. But whereas they had been vocal in ridiculing the disciples, they were silent when Jesus asked them, "What question ye with them?" (Mk. 9:16).

It was left to the distraught father to explain: "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 would cast him out: and they could not" (Mk. 9:17-18).

What a contrast there was between the serenity on the mountain heights and the suffering and tumult on the plain beneath. As if yearning for the time of the Kingdom, Jesus protested to them all — the mocking Scribes, the unbelieving disciples, the anxious father—"O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me" (v.19). The rebuke was no refusal.

### **JESUS EFFECTS THE CURE (Mk. 9:20-29).**

The child was brought forward, but on seeing Jesus he suddenly "fell on the ground and wallowed foaming" (v.20). His father's words were dramatically confirmed.

No doubt the Lord felt for the child, but for the moment he was concerned with developing the father's faith which alone could save the child. There had been tumult and a tense atmosphere and this was not conducive to faith. Jesus sought adequate grounds of faith before he performed the miracle. He turned to the man and asked him how long his son had been like this. "Of a child", he answered, and as if to impress Jesus even further of the urgent need for a cure, he went on to describe how the boy often lost all control of his faculties, falling into the fire and water (v.21-22). Sceptically he added: "but if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us" (v.22). He doubted both Jesus' willingness and also his power.

There was no need for him to implore Jesus for his compassion; the miracles amply testified that he had that quality. Thus it was not a question of whether Jesus was able or willing; rather it was a question of whether the man could believe. Jesus shifted the emphasis to belief on the man's part with the question: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (v.23)! The challenge had the right

effect for with humility of mind the father cried out with tears. "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief" (v.24).

This is what Jesus wanted to see: child-like faith which puts complete trust in the power of God to save. God expects that same trust from us.

It appears that during this moving scene Jesus had drawn the man and his son apart from the crowd. When he saw the people coming towards them again, he delayed no longer in commanding "the dumb and deaf spirit" to come out of the child (v.25). With this the boy uttered a cry, and in a final terrible convulsion lay exhausted in a coma. The people thought he was dead, and we can well understand the father's feelings when he heard them saying "He is dead" (v.26). But had not Jesus said, "If thou canst believe . . .". Taking the boy by the hand, he helped him up and delivered him to his father restored and normal (v.27: Lk. 9:42).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The experience of the transfiguration must have been a glorious incentive to Jesus as he steadfastly set his face towards Jerusalem. The writer to the Hebrews explains that "for the joy that was set before him" the Son of God "endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2).
- We are not called upon to suffer as the Son of God, yet the glorious pictures of the kingdom age can act as an incentive to us. They help us to see the value of attending to the things of God and to put the "attractions" of this world in their right perspective.
- The incident with the epileptic child teaches us that the faith God requires is a vibrant, living power which seeks only the kingdom of God and His righteousness. With faith we can do all things, and tread with confidence that tried path that leads to the kingdom.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"A Life of Jesus" (M.Purkis)—Book 5, Chapter 8

"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 37

"The Gospel of the Son of God" (L. G. Sargent)—Book V, Chapter 1

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What did Jesus mean when he said: "Elias verily cometh first and restoreth all things . . . But I say unto you that Elias is indeed come and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed"?*
2. *Why did Jesus say to the father of the epileptic, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Outline the purpose of the transfiguration:  
(a) for Christ  
(b) for the disciples.*
2. *Outline the events that took place when Jesus was transfigured.*
3. *Describe the healing of the epileptic child. What lessons can we take from this incident?*
4. *Elias and Moses were with Jesus on the mount of the Transfiguration. How was it demonstrated that Jesus was the greatest of the three?*
5. *The joy that was set before Jesus enabled him to endure the cross. What part did the transfiguration play in this respect? Why is it important for us?*

## 16. JESUS TEACHES FORGIVENESS

“Until seventy times seven”

*After curing the epileptic child, Jesus and his disciples remained in Galilee for a short while. Whilst in the area Jesus again told his disciples that he would be betrayed into the hands of men, be killed and rise again on the third day (Matt. 17:22, 23). The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant concerning his death and resurrection. Matthew records that “they were exceeding sorry”, while Mark says, “they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him” (Mk. 9:32).*

*Instead, while Jesus spoke of his suffering to come, the disciples discussed who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. So great was their concern that a dispute arose among them. In the heat of their discussion they forgot that the Lord knew their thoughts. However they were soon to realise that nothing can be hid from the Son of God — something we too should always bear in mind.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that our attitude towards our fellows affects God’s attitude towards us: if we forgive, He will forgive, and if He forgives, so should we.*

### Matthew 18

#### JESUS TEACHES HUMILITY.

Jesus asked his disciples what they had been disputing on the way to Capernaum (Mk. 9:33). They were embarrassed and avoided a direct answer to his question by asking him, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt. 18:1). Sitting down with the twelve, Jesus gave them an unexpected reply. His idea of greatness was different to theirs. He showed that he who is concerned with status in the kingdom, may not even attain unto the kingdom: “If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all” (Mk. 9:35).

To illustrate the “greatness” which he desired to see, Jesus took a child in his arms, and said to the disciples: “Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3-4). Greatness does not involve doing some mighty act whereby our fellows might be impressed. We must be converted by suppressing the pride of human nature, and adopt the teachableness and trust of a little child. The words of Micah are a rule of life in a world always lauding the achievements of man. “What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:8).

### **THE SEEDS OF APOSTASY (Matt. 18:6-7).**

Jesus was not only concerned that the disciples should learn to develop the spirit of humility, but was also anxious that they might see the danger of following the opposite course. He could see that if pride was allowed to develop, very soon contention would arise as to who should exercise control over the group and the principles of ministering to each other would be forgotten.

Thus he said to his disciples: "Whosoever therefore shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (v.6). In using these strong words, Jesus was aligning the fate of the offender who lifts his hand over his brethren in pride, with the fate of Babylon of old. Speaking of the doom of Babylon, Jeremiah was told: "And it shall be when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind to it a stone and cast it into the midst of Euphrates: And thou shalt say: Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her" (Jer. 51:63-64). Jesus knew that with the passing of time "the man of sin, the son of perdition" would arise and pervert the Truth (2 Thess. 2:3-12). This man would head a system of pseudo-christianity in which all the superstition and evil of ancient Babylon would exist: "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (v.7).

Jesus was referring to the rise of the Papacy and Babylon the Great, the Roman Catholic apostasy. Just as ancient Babylon was destroyed, so too will the "mystery of iniquity" at Christ's return: "And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all" (Rev. 18:21).

It is no wonder that Jesus used very strong words in warning his disciples against pride and the quest for power and authority.

### **THE NEED TO AMPUTATE BAD HABITS (Matt. 18:8-9).**

We should be careful lest we cause another to go astray, and also be watchful lest we stumble ourselves. Jesus said to his disciples, "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (vv.8-9).

Jesus of course did not mean his words to be taken literally. Eyes are for seeing, hands for working, and feet for walking. Jesus was instructing his disciples to avoid sights, avoid actions and avoid places that could cause them to stumble. How applicable are the Master's words for young people today. In these sophisticated days there is much to see and to do, and so many places to go. But in them there

may lie a temptation which we cannot resist and which, if persisted in, may cost us eternal life.

Eyes, hands and feet are to use, but in avenues that will fit us for the kingdom of God. If the activities that we are involved in cause us to stumble, then Jesus enjoins painful amputation. Salvation is the essential thing and all other interests or hobbies that hinder our walk must be cut off. Otherwise we may find to our dismay in the day of judgment, that we are cut off. It is far better to suffer the loss of part in this life than to lose all in the end.

### **THE NEED TO THINK OF OTHERS (Matt. 18:10-14).**

In serving God a disciple must always consider others. Even at the time of his greatest trial, Jesus thought of his disciples and prayed for them (Jn. 17:9-11). In God's eyes all believers are "little ones" who need care and attention. If we look upon each other in this light, we can appreciate the words of Jesus, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (v.10).

We often forget this intimate ministration of the angels. Perhaps we only think of them as powerful messengers of God accomplishing His great purposes on dramatic occasions. But here we see them in a different light altogether—they care for God's little ones individually. We also read that they are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister (to run errands) for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14; Psa. 34:7). So highly does God regard those who obey Him that He appoints angels to accompany them. They guide them through difficult paths, help them in times of spiritual danger, and plead for them before the Father. Let us never forget that we are not alone.

The forbearance, patience and love of God are seen in the short parable of the lost sheep (vv.11-14). In the world today it is "every man for himself", but amongst disciples it must be "everyone for others". How easy it would have been for the shepherd to forget about the one sheep that was lost and not waste his time looking for it. But no effort was spared until the lost sheep was recovered.

### **THE SPIRIT OF FORGIVENESS (Matt. 18:15-22).**

The disciples had listened patiently to the Master speak of the attributes of the true disciple, but Peter was still not sure how far to take forgiveness. Luke tells us that Jesus said: "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent: then thou shalt forgive him" (Lk. 17:3-4). Peter wanted to place a limit on the need to forgive, so he came to Jesus and said, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (v.21). Jesus' reply corrected any doubts Peter may have had and showed the true spirit of forgiveness. He told Peter in effect that each day must be



regarded as new and his forgiveness must have no limits: "I say unto thee, Until seventy times seven" (v.22).

In Genesis we read that God threatened a sevenfold vengeance on any who attacked Cain, the murderer of Abel. But Lamech when he had committed murder, boasted that he did not need God's protection and that he would avenge himself: "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold" (Gen. 4:24). It seems that Jesus had the boast of Lamech in mind when he spoke of forgiveness, the opposite of vengeance. Lamech boasted that there would be no limit to his vengeance: Jesus counsels no limit to forgiveness.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING CREDITOR (Matt. 18:23-35).**

To illustrate the importance of forgiving others, Jesus spoke the parable of the Unforgiving Creditor. A certain king took account of his servants and found that one owed him ten thousand talents (according to the R.S.V. margin, one talent was more than 15 years wages of a labourer). As the servant had nothing with which to pay, the king ordered him and all his family to be sold. But the servant fell down and pleaded for mercy saying, "Lord, have patience with me and I will pay thee all". The king was moved with compassion and forgave the debt.

Later the same servant went out and found a fellow servant who owed him a hundred pence (according to the R.S.V. margin the Roman penny or denarius was a day's wages for a labourer). Without mercy he took the servant by the throat and demanded immediate payment. The servant fell at his feet and pleaded for time: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all". But time was not granted and he was cast into prison, "till he should pay the debt".

When the other servants saw what was done they informed the king. He summoned the unmerciful servant and reproved him: "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desirest me: Shouldest not thou have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" The servant was speechless. His lord delivered him to prison and required that he repay the debt which had originally been forgiven.

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses". Every word here is full of meaning.

All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and if God were to "mark our iniquities" we would not be able to stand before Him (Psa. 130:3). God will forgive: He does not deal with us after our sins, or reward us according to our iniquities. In fact "as far as the east is from the west", so far will God remove our transgressions from us, if we turn to Him in humility, confession, and repentance (cp. Psa. 103:8-14).

In the language of the parable, our sins are a debt we cannot pay, but God has graciously blotted them out. But once having been forgiven such a large debt, we must manifest the same spirit to our fellows by forgiving their "small debts". If we withhold mercy from others today, it will not be available to us in the day of judgment: "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy" (Jas. 2:13). And we must forgive "from the heart". There must not be the feeling— "I can forgive, but I cannot forget". God has promised to forgive our many sins, but the basis of His forgiveness is our willingness to forgive (Matt. 6:12). We cannot afford to harbour bitterness and malice towards our fellows. The importance of a humble spirit which can forgive is seen from the fact that after giving the "Lord's Prayer", Jesus immediately returned to this aspect of the prayer (Matt. 6:14, 15).

The words of Paul to the Ephesians are almost a comment on this parable: "Let all bitterness, and wrath and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:31, 32).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- We must not contemplate future greatness but cultivate child-like humility.
- Pride and presumption can lead to apostasy.
- Habits that could take us from the Truth must be amputated.
- We must seek out the lost like the shepherd.
- Our willingness to forgive men will determine whether God will forgive us.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY.**

- "A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Book 5, Chapter 10  
"The Gospel of the Son of God" (L. G. Sargent)—Book V, Chapter 2  
"Parables of the Messiah" (J. Carter)—Nos. 39, 40  
"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Pages 262-263, 325-326

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What did Jesus mean when he said, "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire"?*
2. *List briefly the warnings Jesus gave his disciples when they asked him, "Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:1)?*
3. *What did Jesus mean when he said, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my father, which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10)?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Write an essay about Jesus' teaching when the disciples asked him the question: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1).*
2. *Why did Jesus teach that it is important for us to forgive our fellows?*
3. *Tell the story of the parable of the Unforgiving Creditor. What lessons emerge from this parable?*

## 17. PARABLES OF FINDING THE "LOST"

**"Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth . . ."**

*Jesus emphasised how serious a thing it was to be a disciple of his: "whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33).*

*The response to his appeal came from a particular class of people in Israel — "then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear him" (Lk. 15:1). It was then that the Pharisees and Scribes sought to discredit Jesus: "this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Lk. 15:2). They found fault with him because he mixed with men they thought to be unfit company for righteous men.*

*Against this background Jesus delivered a series of five parables sometimes called "the parables of the lost" (Lk. 15 and 16). We shall consider the first three of these. Notice that Lk. 15:3 says, "and he spake this parable unto them". The word "this" relates to all three parables of chapter 15, and not just to the first of them. They all tell essentially the same story but highlight different facets. Notice also that it is spoken to "them"; namely the Pharisees and Scribes.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show how great are the mercies of God towards those who repent.*

### Luke 15

#### **THE LOST SHEEP (Lk. 15:3-7).**

In the first parable Jesus appealed to their knowledge of caring for sheep: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" This must have been common practice, otherwise the story would not have the same impact. But why would they leave the flock to seek for one lost? Because each was of real value, either commercially or sentimentally. Whether purposely or accidentally, a sheep which had strayed was the shepherd's personal loss. Thus with undivided attention and all his energy he would seek to recover "the lost". He would bound over hill, pass through thickets, and creeks, in the hot sun or the chill of night, calling and listening for the "bleat" that gave hope, "until he find it" (v.4).

Once found, the pain and tiredness of the shepherd were dispelled by "joy"; the heavy burden on his shoulders was light because of the rejoicing in his heart (v.5). On returning home he called together his friends and neighbours to join with him in rejoicing.

## **THE MEANING.**

God is a shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture. His concern for us is expressed in His untiring efforts to have us remain part of His household. His grief when we are "lost" is only equalled by His "seeking" to re-instate us (2 Pet. 3:9). The Pharisees and Scribes considered themselves to be the custodians of the laws of God, but did not understand God's desire to extend His saving power to all. They classified people as "sinners" (v.2), and assumed that righteousness consisted in being separate from them. They saw no need to imitate the shepherd's zeal by going to those "lost" in sin, and persuading them to repent. When Jesus revealed what God would have them do, they insinuated that he was a "sinner", merely because he associated with those whom they despised. They considered themselves to be "just persons" needing no repentance (v.7)! They added to their sin by failing to recover those who were "lost" and by condemning those who did. In another place Jesus called them "whited sepulchres", outwardly clean but inwardly corrupt.

God cannot save those who are "self-righteous", for they see no need to repent, and consider themselves better than others. To this class the "leaders" of Israel belonged. God did not share their view of themselves. He requires all men everywhere to repent. Earlier Jesus had warned: "except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).

## **THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN (Lk. 15:8-10).**

This parable has similarities to the last but the lesson is slightly different. A woman with ten pieces of silver lost one (v.8). A coin is inanimate and so this time no responsibility for being lost rests with the class referred to: the sheep "went" into the wilderness, but the coin was lost in the house. The "house" represents the household of God, or the ecclesia. The ecclesia is also represented as a woman, the bride of Christ, the "virgins" etc., and hence there is a responsibility on her part to watch over her household members. A coin is valuable, but when lost, it is "oblivious" of its real worth.

## **THE MEANING.**

In the day the parable was spoken, the value of such a coin was considerable. Similarly each member in God's family is of worth to Him. The ecclesia then must be sure that each member contributes his part to the whole body. If a brother is "lost" in the house, he attends the ecclesial activities but does not contribute his own true worth. As a woman "lights a candle", so the ecclesia must ensure that the Word of God is spoken and practised. The light of the Word penetrates the darkness of our lives and, along with the sweeping of the broom, uncovers from the dust, the lost coin. The sweeping of the broom represents the diligence of brethren in speaking a word in season, in

visiting the fatherless and widows, etc. We must work for the good of others, adding their value to the house and ensuring that none are lost.

Rejoicing followed the discovery of the lost coin, and the woman called her neighbours to rejoice with her. Even so there is rejoicing when a sinner repents (v.10), or a brother "lost" in the ecclesia revives his interest, zeal and contribution to the household.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON (Lk. 15:11-32).**

Jesus weaves the lessons of the two parables into a third which more vividly portrays the real life issues. In the parable of the Prodigal Son the "lost" is not an animal or an inanimate object, but a son, and the one who has lost him is a father. The lessons therefore are more poignant.

The story depicts the younger son leaving his father's house and the Truth to follow the pleasures of the world in "riotous living". Those who do this waste their "substance" and one day will face a "mighty famine"—a feeling of emptiness and pangs of conscience (v.14). He was destitute, debased and comfortless: "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat" (v.16).

In his extremity he cast his mind back to his former state. He reasoned that he would be better off humbling himself and returning home to become a hired servant. In verse 18 he shows the essence of true repentance: confession of sin, and acknowledgement of total unworthiness to receive blessings from his father.

His father, however, always longed for his return and, despite the passage of time, still looked across the fields in the hope that his son might return. He was "a great way off" when he saw him! This shows how much God seeks those who are lost. He was filled with compassion and ran to meet him. He fell on his neck and kissed him (v.20).

Pleading that such mercy was undeserved and unjustified, the younger son sought to have his father moderate his joy. But his protest was to no avail. Grace upon grace; blessing upon blessing were given to him. His father gave him the best robe, a ring for his hand, and shoes for his feet. He gave orders to kill the fatted calf and to prepare a feast. There was great merriment and the reason was given: "for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (v.24).

After showing again God's delight when a sinner repents, the parable dwells on the attitude of the elder brother. He heard the sound of merriment and sought the reason for it. The explanation given by the servant shows how brethren should look at their fellows in the service of the Truth: "thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound" (v.27).

The anger of the elder brother showed his spirit to be the opposite to

that of his father: he “would not go in” and join with the rejoicing (cp. Matt. 21:31-32).

The extent of God’s longsuffering can be seen from the fact that the father came “out and intreated him”. The elder son expressed his resentment at his father’s “injustice” and his words show how conscious he was of his own righteousness: “these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends” (v.29). He was too aware of what he had done for his father. He had forgotten the privileges he had received and held his father in debt for his service to him. He considered that recompense should be on the basis of law and work done, and could not comprehend the spirit of grace. He could not understand why his father should forgive and honour a person who had been wicked and reprobate.

The father’s reply reasserted the correctness of his actions towards the prodigal son, and at the same time appealed to the elder son to appreciate his spirit: “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again: and was lost and is found” (v.32).

There is tragic irony in this parable. The elder son, who prided himself in his obedience when put to the true test of sonship, was “lost”, being unable to rejoice over his brother’s change of heart. Here was a son in the house, yet “lost” just as surely as the coin. He represents the self-righteous “Pharisee class” of all ages.

The younger brother was at first unable to appreciate the value of true riches. He came to his senses at length and repented, and cast himself upon his father’s mercy. He represented the “publicans and sinners who drew near to hear him” and repented of their former way of life and followed the life of their new found Lord (v.1).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- God loves us and is grieved when we stray from the Truth.
- He is longsuffering and greatly desires to restore those who are lost. He is willing that none should perish (1 Tim. 2:4).
- It is possible to be “lost” while still remaining in the household of faith.
- The elder son was “lost” because he failed to perceive and reveal his father’s grace.
- We must, like God, seek to save sinners, however far they may have departed from God (James 5:19-20).

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“Parables of the Messiah” (J. Carter)—Nos. 72-74  
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Pages 252-254

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Why did Jesus speak the three "Parables of the Lost?"*
2. *What lessons do we learn from the parable of the Lost Sheep?*
3. *What lessons do we learn from the parable of the Lost Coin?*
4. *What was wrong with the attitude of the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son?*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Write an essay comparing the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son.*
2. *In the Parables of the Lost, what is the reaction of the shepherd, the woman and the father when:*
  - a) *the sheep, coin and son, respectively, are lost?*
  - b) *the sheep, coin and son, respectively, are found?**What do these reactions mean to you?*
3. *Tell the parable of the Prodigal Son, placing emphasis upon the personal lessons that emerge from it.*
4. *How is the grace of God revealed in the three Parables of the Lost?*
5. *How does the parable of the Prodigal Son more vividly bring out the lessons of the parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin?*
6. *What personal lessons and exhortations emerge from the three "Parables of the Lost?"*



## 18. JESUS GIVES LIFE TO THE DEAD

**“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God”**

*Following an attempt made on his life, Jesus left Jerusalem and crossed the River Jordan to the place where John at first baptised (Jn. 10:39-40). Three years had passed since John baptised him, and his public work began. Jesus knew the end of His ministry was drawing near. Before his own death and resurrection, the greatest miracle of all was yet again to be performed. Jesus had given life to the widow's son at Nain and to Jairus' daughter (Lk. 7:14; 8:55). Now Lazarus, whose name means “El will help”, would receive life from the dead, through the power vested in God's anointed Son.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show that Jesus has power over man's greatest enemy, death, and that for those who die in Christ, death is but a sleep.*

### John 11

#### **JESUS HEARS OF LAZARUS' ILLNESS (Jn. 11:1-5).**

Tragedy came to a little family living in the village of Bethany, some three kilometres from Jerusalem. Lazarus, who was a friend of Jesus and brother of Mary and Martha, became very ill. Looking at him as he lay on his bed, his sisters saw that death was near. Their thoughts went to Jesus. Remembering his miracles and confident that Jesus could help, they frantically sought his aid.

Thus a message reached Jesus on the eastern side of Jordan: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick”. Jesus gave the messenger a reply to take back: “This sickness is not unto death but for (i.e. for the promotion of) the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (v.4).

It seemed strange that Jesus did not respond as expected to the call for help. His words seemed to imply that the ill health of Lazarus was not serious.

#### **JESUS DELAYS HIS JOURNEY TO BETHANY (Jn. 11:6-16).**

For two days Jesus delayed his journey to Bethany. Martha and Mary knew that if only Jesus would come this sorrow would cease. He then acquainted his disciples of his intention to return to Judea. Knowing of his recent escape from death there, they were amazed (v.8), but he reassured them. He then told them the reason for the departure: “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep” (v.11). There was a confusion of terms. They thought he meant normal healthy sleep. In fact, he meant death. Jesus spoke plainly, “Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe” (vv.14-15).

The miracle of resurrection was to be as much for their learning and comfort as for the family in Bethany. Jesus was thinking of others all the time, and trying to arrange matters for their benefit.

### **MARTHA'S CONVERSATION WITH JESUS (Jn. 11:17-27).**

At Bethany, the burial of Lazarus was over and the tomb sealed. Many of the mourning friends of Mary and Martha remained at their house to comfort them. Meanwhile Jesus came near to Bethany. Hearing that Jesus was coming, Martha left the house and hurried out to meet him. "Lord", cried the elder sister, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (v.21). To this Jesus replied, "Thy brother will rise again" (v.23). Martha understood that he would rise at the last day, but did not take into account that he might be restored to life immediately. "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day", she replied. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (vv.25-26). His statement taught several things:

1. He is the life-giver to "whosoever . . .". Jesus is the life of the world, both to the Jew and Gentile.
2. A living faith is necessary. We must put our beliefs into practice. Christ must live in us and we must build into our lives the divine qualities seen in His Son (Gal. 2:20). Those who do that will not merely live, but will live eternally.

Jesus looked into her face, "Believest thou this?" Again the sure response came, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (v.27).

### **MARY COMES TO JESUS (Jn. 11:28-37).**

On returning to the house, Martha drew Mary aside to tell her of the Lord's arrival. Mary hurried to the Master. She made the same faithful assertion as her sister, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (v.32).

Jesus was deeply affected at the grief of Martha and Mary and all their mourning friends. As they led him to the sepulchre, Jesus wept with compassion (cp. Lk. 7:13): he entered into the remorse of the people (Heb. 4:15). Those present, seeing his tears and knowing his reputation, wondered that he had not come earlier to heal the sick man.

Jesus was also weeping because he could see in this death the sorrow of all humanity, the sorrow brought by sin. In a short time, he too would be placed in a tomb, and the manner of his death would reveal "how he loved" not merely Lazarus, but all who would come to him and live (Jn. 15:13; 1 Jn. 3:16).

### **THE MIRACLE OF RESURRECTION (Jn. 11:38-46).**

The group moved on to the site of the tomb. Four days had passed since Lazarus had died and had been buried. Jesus asked to have the stone removed. Martha was horrified: "Lord, by this time he stinketh" (v.39). This was to be no obscure miracle.

The stone was removed. Jesus lifted his eyes and prayed to his Father. Then his voice of authority spanned the space between himself and the grave, "Lazarus come forth" (v.43). To the amazement of the hushed assembly, Lazarus, bound in grave clothes, shuffled out of the tomb. The people were stunned as Lazarus stood helpless before his Saviour. "Loose him", said Jesus, "and let him go" (v.44).

The miracle had revealed the glory of God (vv.4, 40). It taught that Jesus is the "resurrection and the life". In this city of sorrow, for Bethany means "the house of the poor or afflicted one", Lazarus had died to lead others to God. He typified the Lord in his sacrificial death and resurrection and this parallel was not lost upon the Lord; nor should we miss the application of this meaning to his death. The Lord's death must in normal circumstances have been the end of natural life, but God strengthened him, raising him from the dead. The result—GLORY TO GOD in a much more permanent sense than was the case with Lazarus.

All of the incidents surrounding this miracle serve to remind us of Yahweh's declaration to Moses: "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with MY GLORY" (Num. 14:21). God lives, and because He lives, His purpose and glory are to be made manifest in living things also. His is the power of life, which power He has given to His Son (Jn. 5:26).

It is appropriate that this was the seventh of the eight signs recorded by John. Seven is the covenant number and is representative of the Covenant that provides the key that will unlock death and the grave (Rev. 1:18). The death and resurrection of the Lord provided the confirmation of the new covenant (Rom. 15:8), and the guarantee that all those truly in Him should likewise be raised to life eternal (Rom. 6:5). Jesus will abolish death for those whom He hath chosen (read Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:15-25; 2 Tim. 1:10).

### **THE SANHEDRIN MEETS (Jn. 11:47-57).**

Many of the Jews who saw the resurrection of Lazarus believed in Jesus straightaway. Others went quickly and told the Pharisees what had happened. This provoked an immediate crisis. The chief priests and Pharisees assembled the Sanhedrin. The destruction of Jesus now became official council policy (v.53). Jesus, knowing their plans, went and hid himself, realising that he had come another step closer to his crucifixion.

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Martha and Mary were moved by the influence of Christ's example and teaching. We too must manifest a similar living faith. All that we do should be to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).
- "Life is the time to serve the Lord". In death there can be no remembrance, no work, no hope at all. (Psa. 88:3-12; Ecc. 9:10).
- When we see "the light of the world" we will not stumble, but "have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12; 9:4-5; 10:10). For us, then, death becomes merely a sleep, while we await the resurrection day (1 Thess. 4:14-16).

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- "The Story of the Bible" (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 10, Pages 130-141  
"A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Book 6, Chapter 8  
"The Gospel of John" (J. Carter)—Chapter 11  
"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapter 42

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. Explain Jesus' statement: "*I am the resurrection and the life*".
2. In what way was the raising of Lazarus a highly significant event?
3. What was the reaction of the people to the raising of Lazarus?
4. Why did Jesus delay coming to Lazarus when he heard he was sick?

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. Briefly tell the story of the raising of Lazarus, and discuss its bearing upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. What personal exhortations emerge from the story of the raising of Lazarus? What fundamental doctrines do we learn from this miracle?

## Section 4

# TO JERUSALEM FOR TRIAL, CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION

The final phase of the ministry of the Lord had been reached. The days were approaching when he was to be “numbered with the transgressors”, and, “by wicked hands, be crucified and slain”.

At the beginning of his ministry John the Baptist had pointed him out as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”. Now as his final Passover drew near, “the Lamb” who was to be slain came to Jerusalem. Examined by his antagonists, he was found to be faultless and thus he could “bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

In his last days, and even in his last hours, Jesus’ concern was for his disciples. He instructed them through parable and prophecy to be wise and faithful, to hold fast even though he himself would suffer many things and be taken away from them. But they seemed not to hear; so when the time of his greatest trial came, they all forsook him and fled. Alone he stood before Pilate, yet not alone for God was with him (Jn. 16:32).

On that day of tragedy he was condemned by Jew and Gentile until finally he was led forth and crucified. Thus the love of our heavenly Father was shown in providing His beloved Son for the sins of the world (Jn. 3:16).

A life of promise seemed to have ended in disaster, and all appeared lost. But three days later, he rose again, triumphant over death. Then, having further instructed his disciples for 40 days, he ascended into heaven, and “sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:12, 13).

## 19. "BEHOLD YOUR KING"

**"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"**

*Jesus' raising of Lazarus had set off a violent reaction and his life was threatened (Jn. 11:53, 57). To escape the murderous intentions of the Jews, Jesus journeyed north to the city of Ephraim. His time was not yet come, and although "the Passover was at hand", it was necessary that "all things written in the Law and the Prophets should be fulfilled". He fled as a fugitive, with but twelve disciples — he returned to die. But his return is an earnest of that greater day to come when as king he will enter into his city in power and great glory, with the glorious company of the saints gathered about him (Matt. 21:1-11; Psa. 24:7-10).*

*The aim of the lesson is to see how Jesus demonstrated that he was indeed the Son of David who would come in the name of the Lord.*

### **Matthew 21:1-22**

#### **JESUS ENTERS JERICHO (Lk. 18:35-19:10).**

The Passover was only a week away when the Lord journeyed south towards Jericho. The route was thronged with pilgrims, all making their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. On approaching the city, Jesus came upon a blind man whom he subsequently healed (Lk. 18:35-43). This miracle greatly excited the crowds and increased interest in the person of the Lord Jesus. As he walked along the narrow streets of Jericho, people thronged about Him, so that those on the outskirts of the crowd could not see him.

One of Jericho's wealthy citizens, the despised and shunned chief of the taxgatherers, greatly desired to see Jesus. But Zacchaeus was small of stature. He tried to push forward, but to no avail for the crowd was dense. The increased excitement and fervour heralded the approach of Jesus. Zacchaeus determined to see him. Ahead of him was a sycamore tree, a wild fig with spreading branches and leafy foliage. Here was his answer. Not without effort, he climbed the tree and waited, confident no one could see him. Jesus approached and when underneath the tree, he stopped and looked up. The company below followed the eyes of Jesus to the little man lodged precariously on a branch of the tree. How foolish Zacchaeus looked! How glad the people were to see him so embarrassed! "Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house," said the Lord (Lk. 19:5). The publican could hardly believe his ears. He scrambled out of the tree, knowing in his heart that a great change was about to come into his life. The crowds murmured at Jesus' choice of hosts, but the Lord knew the hearts of men and that Zacchaeus was capable of better things. His choice was soon vindicated for Zacchaeus, addressing Jesus as Lord, humbly vowed to restore fourfold anything taken by

falsehood and to give half of his goods to the poor. Zacchaeus had lifted the burden of an evil conscience off his shoulders; he was now “free” and a son of Abraham. Compare his new resolve with Abraham’s attitude towards the King of Sodom (Gen. 14:21), and before the sons of Heth (Gen. 23). Zacchaeus had been “lost”, but the Lord had sought him and found him; in this, Jesus’ mission as the Saviour was fulfilled. He well illustrates the “Parables of the Lost” Jesus had recently spoken (Luke 15).

#### **THE JOURNEY OF THE NOBLEMAN (Lk. 19:11-27).**

The Lord stayed with Zacchaeus all that night. He would enter Jerusalem the following afternoon. Because of the forthcoming events and because the disciples thought that the time was appropriate for the setting up of the Kingdom (v.11), Jesus delivered unto them the parable of the Nobleman. He represented himself as a nobleman who had to go into a far country (heaven) in order to receive authority, and then to take it up. It clearly taught that a period of time must elapse before he would return to reign on the earth from Jerusalem, the very city “he was nigh unto” at this time. The attitude of his servants during his absence would determine their fate when he returned. Again the parallel with the disciples of Christ is plain. They will be judged when the Lord returns according to their works (2 Cor. 5:10).

#### **JESUS COMES TO BETHANY (Jn. 12:1-9).**

The Lord left Jericho for the tiring journey along the road up the steep white hills of Judea to the capital city Jerusalem, some 30 kilometres away. It was “six days before the Passover” (v.1) when Jesus reached the home of Martha in the little village of Bethany by the Mount of Olives.

Pilgrims were flocking into the city of Jerusalem from all parts. The normal excitement which accompanied the Passover was accentuated by a question that was on the lips of all. It concerned Jesus, and was expressed in one simple enquiry, “Will he come to the feast” (Jn. 11:56).

#### **BEHOLD THY KING COMETH (Matt. 21:1-5).**

Jesus was acquainted with what the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets had testified concerning him, and all his actions thenceforward were guided by the Word of God. Coming to Bethphage, he directed his disciples to a farmhouse where they would find an ass and her colt tied near her. “Loose them, and bring them to me”, he said.

The ass was a symbol of kingly honour (2 Sam. 16:1-2; 1 Kgs. 1:33, 38), and this is its signification here as Jesus’ actions were a fulfilment of Zechariah 9:9. Jesus intended to show beyond all doubt that he was the Davidic king, yet in such a way as to give no cause for thinking that he would lead a military revolt against Rome.

### **TRIUMPHANT ENTRANCE (Matt. 21:6-11).**

The news of Jesus' coming caused the people to flood out of Jerusalem and climb the Mount of Olives to meet him. They shouted with triumph as they spontaneously welcomed him like a conqueror, strewing garments and palm leaves before him. "Hosanna" to the Son of David they cried, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Psa. 118:26). Israel's desire was for a KING, Messiah the Prince. The Jewish authorities were horrified that the people should ascribe Messiahship to Jesus. But the King of Israel, manifesting the grace and mercy of the Father, had in fact come to them. However, the understanding of the people was superficial. In a few short days their enthusiasm was to turn to hatred for they would crucify their king. How fickle is human nature!

Coming to the temple, Jesus "looked round about on all things". Nothing had changed — the House of God was still the place of barter and merchandise (Jn. 2:16). His verdict would be seen in the events of the following day. That night he returned to Bethany with his disciples (Mk. 11:11).

### **CLEANSING THE TEMPLE (Matt. 21:12-19).**

On his way back to Jerusalem early next morning he was hungry (v.18). A fig tree on the roadside attracted his attention. The tree was in leaf and should therefore have produced some pre-summer figs at least. This was not the case. Although promising and showy in appearance, the tree lacked fruit. In the hearing of the disciples, Christ addressed it: "Let no man eat fruit of you from now on for ever".

Leaving the fig tree, the Lord made his way into the city to the court of the temple where he found a hive of activity, noise, impatience, greed and gain. Jesus passed through the court, turned out those that bought and sold, and scattered coins by overturning the money tables. His voice rang out, "Is it not written. My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (v.13). The cleansing foreshadowed the scattering of the Jews from Jerusalem 40 years later by the Romans. When he quoted Jeremiah 7:11 and called the temple a "den of thieves" he was using the words the prophet had used of Solomon's Temple—the fate of that temple would also befall the temple Herod had built. But Jesus also saw clearly the coming day when Yahweh's Temple would be the centre of world-wide worship (Isa. 56:7).

When the ungodly and ambitious had been ejected from the temple courts they were replaced by those who were in true need of the sanctuary of God. The blind and the lame came to him and he healed them. He had other visitors too. Those who falsely called themselves the children of God were removed and the children he loved came to fill their place. Echoing the shouts they had heard all about them the previous day they cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (v.15). And when the temple officials saw these things they were sore displeased, "Hearest thou what these say?" "Yea," he replied, "have ye never



read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"(v.16).

### **THE WITHERED FIG TREE (Matt. 21:20-22).**

It was on the way from Bethany the following day that the disciples were startled by the withered fig tree. In symbol the fig tree stood for Israel (Joel 1:7). Luke 13:5-9 records the parable of the Barren Fig Tree. If this tree bore fruit after fertilising it was to be spared. Jesus on that occasion did not finish the parable. Time would have to elapse before its fate would be known. In this incident before us Jesus demonstrates that the fig tree remained barren and would be destroyed. Thus he completes the parable.

As true Israelites we need to produce fruit both "in season and out of season" or a similar judgment will befall us (2 Tim. 4:2). We must develop the faith of God in ourselves and learn to look at life from His standpoint (Mk. 11:22). Through the cleansing power of the Word and prayer we can overcome sin and produce fruit which will be pleasing to our God (Mk. 11:23-24).

### **JESUS' AUTHORITY CHALLENGED (Matt. 21:23-27).**

When Jesus came into the temple again, his enemies were ready to take him. "By what authority doest thou these things?" they asked (v.23). Jesus met this searching question with another, promising to answer theirs when they had answered his: yet his question was in effect both an answer to theirs and an exposure of their crafty motives. "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? Answer me". In appealing to John, Christ appealed to one whom all men accounted a prophet, to one, moreover, whose whole mission was to reveal the identity of the Christ. Here was indeed the authority for his work. Jesus challenged them to state their views on the prophet's message. To acknowledge John (to say his baptism was "from heaven") was to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ: this they obviously were not prepared to do. Yet to condemn the ministry of John (to say his baptism was "of men") was equally impossible in view of the unshakable conviction of the people concerning him. Their only escape lay in an abject confession of their ignorance, "We cannot tell," a confession which could have deceived nobody, and only emphasised the decisiveness of their defeat. "Neither", said Jesus, "do I tell you by what authority I do these things" (v.27).

Jesus then spoke three parables:—

1. The Two Sons (vv. 28-32)
2. The Wicked Husbandmen (vv. 33-46)
3. The Marriage of the King's Son (22:1-14).

In these parables he revealed his knowledge of their murderous intentions, the judgment they would suffer and the call of the Gentiles.

**LESSONS FOR US:**

- Like Zacchaeus, if we seek Jesus with all our heart, we shall find him and be found of him.
- We are today awaiting the return of the nobleman who will suitably reward his faithful servants with a place in the Temple of the future.
- Jesus said that in the mouths of babes praise is perfected. God delights in the praise and thanksgiving of His children.
- It is important for us to bring forth fruit in the service of the Truth, otherwise the fate of the fig tree will be ours also.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 10, Pages 186-188;  
Vol. 11, Pages 33-71  
“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 7, Chapters 3-6  
“Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 48

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What was Jesus' purpose in riding triumphantly into Jerusalem?*
2. *What was Jesus teaching by cursing the fig tree?*
3. *What lessons do we learn from the conversion of Zacchaeus?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Describe the triumphant entry of Jesus to Jerusalem. What was Jesus demonstrating by riding the colt into Jerusalem?*
2. *Describe the incident in which Jesus cleansed the Temple the second time. Explain his words and the reasons for his actions.*
3. *How does the cursing of the fig tree fulfil the parable of the Barren Fig Tree?*
4. *How did Jesus confound those who said to him, “By what authority doest thou these things?”*

## 20. ANSWERING HIS OPPONENTS

**“And no man after that durst ask him any questions”**

*The Jewish leaders were seething with hatred toward Jesus. He had openly pointed out their weaknesses by parable and they “perceived that he spake against them” (Mk. 12:12).*

*They were determined that Jesus must be destroyed and in a way which appeared to be right in the eyes of the people. They thought up three questions. They were sure that if he attempted to answer them he would be sure to say something that they could use to dishonour him in the eyes of the people so they could arrest him. So they came to Jesus feigning sincerity but in reality they were hypocrites (Matt. 22:18) and spies (Lk. 20:20).*

*The aim of this lesson is to show how complete was the wisdom of Jesus when he was tried by the rulers of the Jews.*

### Mark 12

#### **QUESTION 1: TRIBUTE TO CAESAR OR NOT? (Mk. 12:13-17).**

The Pharisees came with the Herodians. They were political opponents but they overlooked their differences in order to destroy a common enemy — one they considered a greater threat to themselves than they were to each other! The Pharisees were proud, self-righteous and fiercely patriotic. They hated the Romans and despised those who supported them, such as the Herodians and tax-gatherers, like Matthew (Mk. 2:16). They paid taxes with great reluctance, for their understanding of the Law forbid it. The Herodians were loyal to Herod’s rule and Rome, and they paid taxes and encouraged others to do so. Thus when they came together to Jesus with this question of importance: “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or no?” there was an air of genuineness.

They flattered his fearlessness: “Master, we know thou art true and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men: but teachest the way of God in truth”. Why did they do this? Because they expected a “No” answer so that they might accuse him before the governor (Lk. 20:20). But if they received instead a “Yes” answer, then the Pharisees would be able to expose him as unpatriotic. They insisted on a “Yes” or “No” answer: “Shall we give, or shall we not give?” They could conceive no way in which Jesus could possibly escape the trap they thought was hidden in their question.

But their underlying purpose and pretence was obvious to the perceptive Son of God: “he knew what was in man”, and without fear of man he cut through their hypocrisy and revealed their motive: “Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny that I may see it”

Jesus had seized the initiative: there was no hesitation in his approach to the question: the Romans had come into Judea because it

was God's will and tribute had been laid upon the people. It was not a matter of "shall we give?"—they had no choice.

A penny or denarius was at length given him. He then asked them a question, the answer to which gave them their answer from their own lips, "Whose is this image and superscription?" They replied, "Caesar's!" The head of Tiberius, the Emperor of the Roman Empire, was emblazoned on one side, while on the other side was the inscription "Pontifex Maximus" (meaning of Pontifex Maximus - Head priest ) for Tiberius sought to have his subjects revere him as a god!

Jesus' answer was simple, logical and yet profound. In it he resolved for all time the question of divided loyalties. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (v.17).

They marvelled! Well they might, for they could neither accuse him before the governor nor expose him as unpatriotic to the Jews? They had showed him a sovereign coin with Caesar's image stamped on it. Plainly it belonged to Caesar and it was only right that it should be given back to him.

But there were certain things which belonged to God and which they had received from Him. These — love, life and worship — the best things in life — had come from God, and ought to be "rendered" to Him. They could not be purchased with money (Isa. 55:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:19). Instead of going about to kill Jesus, they needed to return to God the love which He had shown in sending His only begotten Son into the world to redeem the world. They had been fashioned in the image and likeness of God to reveal His glory (Gen. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 11:7). Were they rendering service to Him? Were they concerned about pleasing Him who had created them? Were they trying to develop characters after the image of their Saviour? They were about to crucify him! Exposed, ashamed and frustrated, they went away.

## **QUESTION 2: THE RESURRECTION AND MARRIAGE (Mk. 12:18-27).**

Then came the Sadducees — a class of people who disbelieved the resurrection and only accepted the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, in which they saw no direct reference to the resurrection (Acts 23:8). They had a question which they thought was very clever and certain to embarrass anyone who believed in the resurrection. But instead the weakness of their own position was exposed, and that from the Pentateuch itself! They posed the question of a woman being married to seven brothers in turn, each one dying before any children could be born: "In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife".

Imagine the smooth way in which this question would be put, and the look of smug satisfaction on the faces of these "wolves in sheep's clothing". How quickly their expressions changed! Jesus was direct and to the point: "Do ye not therefore err!" They had never

been spoken to like that before. They were not used to any of the “common” people challenging their statements, much less accusing them of error in their interpretation of law. But they “knew not the scriptures, nor the power of God” and Jesus proceeded to demonstrate this to them (Mk. 12:24-25).

First of all they had wrong ideas about the Kingdom and marriage. Marriage had been primarily designed in the beginning for the multiplication of godly men so that the earth would be populated by man and subdued (Gen. 1:26-27). In later times in Israel the object of marriage was the procreation of a godly seed (Mal. 2:15; Ezra 9:2). But in the Kingdom such seed will be glorified and given authority with Christ (Rev. 5:9-10). The purpose of marriage, therefore, so far as the saints are concerned, will have been fulfilled. Corruption cannot inherit incorruption: mortality, marriage and procreation will form no part of the lives of those who through the resurrection “will be made equal to the angels, able to die no more” (Mk. 12:25; Lk. 20:34-36). It was because the Sadducees were carnally-minded and ignorant of the scriptures that they were so far astray.

Jesus then took the opportunity to teach them a fundamental doctrine out of their own law: “As touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spoke unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?” They had not comprehended the implications of this statement. So great were the three fathers of Israel in God’s estimation that even though they were dead and long since buried He spoke of them as though they were alive. He had chosen to be known by their names and His promise was to them (Heb. 11:16; Gen. 17:7). This meant that they would be resurrected by His power, which Jesus said they did not understand. Yahweh is the living God and is willing that none should perish. So those who die and are loved by Him will surely live again, and the gateway to life is the resurrection: “He is not the God of the dead but of the living” (v.27; cp Rom. 4:19). In any case the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob included possession of the Land of Canaan forever (Gen. 13:15). Abraham died without possessing it (Acts 7:5; Hab. 11:13), and so his inheritance is yet future. Thus the resurrection is taught by promising something that entails it.

Their ignorance was therefore very great: “Ye therefore do greatly err” (v.27).

### **QUESTION 3: WHICH IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT? (Mk. 12:28-34).**

The Sadducees were silenced, but the Pharisees returned again to the attack. One of them, who was also a scribe and lawyer, perceived the force of Jesus’ comments and thoughtfully asked a searching question (v.28; Matt: 22:35). Jesus recognised this man as a basically genuine enquirer (v.34), so when we read in Matthew 22:35 that he

“tempted” Jesus, it is apparent from the context that it was a trial without malicious intent.

Jesus took his stand from Old Testament revelation and answered, “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” (vv.29, 30). Because God is an undivided unity, He must be worshipped with undivided devotion: He will not share His singular glory with graven images (Isa. 42:8), or any other form of devotion (Col. 3:5). Because He is an indivisible unity, all creation must eventually be brought into Oneness with Him (1 Cor. 15:58). We must dedicate whole-heartedly every faculty to the service of God—our thoughts, words and deeds.

Jesus did not let the matter rest there. The profession of love for God was easy to make, but Jesus added a test whereby the profession could be tried to see if it was genuine. If a man truly loves God he will also love his fellow man: “the second is like”, he said, “namely this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”. It was here that the hollowness of their profession to love God could be seen (vv.38-40). Disregard for the poor and the widows, coupled with self-centred piety, revealed quite plainly that the Pharisee loved neither God nor man but himself. Jesus said the two commandments were inseparable and John links them together in the same way: “he who loveth God loveth his brother also” (1 Jn. 4:21). Our love or otherwise of our fellows, then, provides a telling test of whether we are Christ’s disciples, and there is much need for self-examination of our attitude and actions.

The Scribe answered in agreement and made a comparison between the relative values of love and sacrifice. He knew, like Samuel, that love and obedience were more important to God than sacrifice, which might be made with an evil heart (1 Sam. 15:22-25; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6-8; Psa. 40:6-8; Prov. 15:8). Jesus commended his answer and commented that he was not far from the Kingdom of God.

### **CHRIST—THE SON OF GOD (Mk. 12:35-37).**

The divine wisdom of the Lord had been revealed and all had been silenced. Jesus then put a question to them, “How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David”, when David himself addresses him as “Lord” (Psa. 110:1)? Perceiving the implications of the question, they refrained from answering. In Israel sons were always considered subordinate to their fathers. This would have especially been the case with David, the Lord’s anointed and the greatest king of Israel. Thus the apparent anomaly of David addressing his son as Lord threw into relief his superior descent: David’s son was David’s Lord because he was also the Son of God (2 Sam. 7:14). It was this that they were unwilling to acknowledge, for then they would have been bound to accept Jesus’ claims, teaching and authority. They were aware that he was recognised as the son of David (e.g. Mk. 10:47) and that a number of times Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, and that his miracles

evidenced this (Jn. 8:42, 54; 10:24-25, 36-38). With stubborn blindness the rulers refused to accept him as God's Son, but the common people heard him gladly.

### **THE WEALTH OF THE POOR (Mk. 12:41-44).**

Jesus denounced the rulers for ostentatious piety, their devotions which were calculated to receive the applause of men, and their show of giving (cp. Matt. 6:2). He was boldly speaking near the Temple treasury where he could see the "rich cast in much". Then in contrast he noticed a poor widow cast in a mere two mites! On the surface it appeared that her offering was miserly, while the rich seemed generous. But Jesus declared the opposite to be the case: they had cast in "of their abundance," but, though it amounted to little, she had cast in more, even all she had!

Her example, in a certain sense, bears upon the three incidents of the day.

1. She was too poor to be troubled by taxation. She paid what she owed and what was left over she gave to God. Her wants did not matter.
2. She was a widow—of the class whose houses were devoured by the rich (Mk. 12:40)! She depended upon God and waited patiently for a better day.
3. Her whole life — "all her living" — was devoted to God, as the first commandment required. Jesus commended her but rebuked the hypocritical Pharisees.

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus could have heaped disgrace upon his interrogators but instead he treated their questions seriously and in each case drew out the question of the utmost worth.
- Our approach to the Word of God must be sincere and stimulated by a wholehearted desire to serve Him and not ourselves. We must not "put on a show" like the Pharisees did before the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Material possessions can be a blessing in our lives if used correctly. They can also be a snare to us. We should not covet them or allow them to occupy our whole time.
- God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and we can share in the inheritance of those faithful men by putting our trust in their seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by being baptised into his name (Gal. 3:27-29). A life lived then in obedience to God will inspire within us a love not only of God, but of each other. We will be keen to spread the "Good News" to others and help them attain to the same glorious goal that we have.

- We do not have to be rich in order to serve God. God has chosen the poor in this world who are rich in faith to be heirs of His Kingdom (Jas. 2:5).

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“The Story of the Bible” (H.P. Mansfield)—Vol. 11, Pages 71-88  
 “Nazareth Revisited” (Robert Roberts)—Chapter 49  
 “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 7, Chapter 7

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How did Jesus prove from Psalm 110 that he was the Son of God?*
2. *What did Jesus mean when he said that the poor widow had cast in to the treasury more than all?*
3. *How does the statement “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” prove the resurrection?*
4. *What did Jesus mean when he said, “Render to Caesar the things that be Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk. 12:17)?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *When Jesus was tried by the Jewish rulers on the matters of:—*
  - a) *giving tribute to Caesar;*
  - b) *the Resurrection; and*
  - c) *the first commandment;**he answered them seriously and drew out the principles of the utmost worth. Discuss these principles.*
2. *Discuss the answer of Jesus to the question, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?” and comment on its application to you.*
3. *What is your understanding of the two greatest commandments that Jesus cited when asked what was the first commandment of all?*
4. *How did Jesus answer the Sadducees’ question about the resurrection relating to the woman who was given to seven brothers in turn as they died?*



## 21. THE OLIVET PROPHECY AND TODAY

**“Watch ye therefore and pray always”**

*The disciples had listened to the terrible denunciation of the Jewish rulers and had heard the Lord’s conclusion: “Behold your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38).*

*While he was in the Temple his attention was drawn, apparently casually, to its grand masonry and imposing architecture. Perhaps his earlier words about its coming desolation seemed incredible. In any case Jesus’ reply was a strong confirmation of them: “As for these things which ye behold, the days will come in the which there will not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Lk. 21:6). These fearful words lingered in the minds of the disciples as they followed the Lord eastward, down the Kedron Valley and began to ascend the Mount of Olives towards Bethany. While resting upon the Mount, Peter, James, John and Andrew took the opportunity to further question the Lord: “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” (Mk. 13:1-4). Jesus’ answer is the “Olivet Prophecy”, recorded at length in all synoptic gospels. In it he reveals the events leading up to AD 70, when the Romans desolated the city. But more importantly he sweeps forward to the end of the times of the Gentiles, when the calamities preceding his coming would be world-wide, and the time of the judgment at hand.*

*The prophecy may therefore be divided thus:*

1. *Lk. 21:8-24: Signs leading up to the desolation of Jerusalem in AD 70.*
2. *Lk. 21:25-28: Events prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.*
3. *Lk. 21:29-33: The parable of the Fig Tree.*
4. *Lk. 21:34-38: Warning to Watch.*

*The aim of this lesson is to see that Jesus accurately prophesied events which were fulfilled in AD 70, and that he has also foretold the events we see taking place today at the end of the times of the Gentiles — which are a warning to us.*

### **Luke 21:5-36**

#### **SIGNS LEADING UP TO JERUSALEM’S DESTRUCTION**

**(Lk. 21:8-24).**

1. **False Christs (v.8):** This prediction was amply fulfilled in a number of people claiming to be Messiah. One, an Egyptian, is mentioned in Acts 21:38. He represented himself as a prophet and led a great company to the Mount of Olives, claiming that the walls of Jerusalem would fall, giving them the city. Felix attacked and

routed them, but the Egyptian escaped. Later, Simon bar Kochbar claimed to be Messiah, and led the Jews against Rome. He was conquered by Emperor Hadrian (134 AD) who ploughed Jerusalem as a field. He sowed it with salt, changed its name and erected a temple to Jupiter on its site.

2. **Wars and Political Unrest (vv. 9-10):** Jewish unrest, the result in part of the false Messiahs, made it necessary for Rome to forcibly quell the uprisings. Tacitus (AD 58-120) describes the time as “rich in disasters, frightful in its wars; torn by civil strife; and even in its peace, full of horrors”.
3. **Earthquakes, Famine, Pestilence and Signs (v.11):** An earthquake accompanied the Lord’s death (Matt. 27:51) and one such famine was prophesied by Agabus (Acts 11:28). Josephus mentions a number of fearful sights which were taken as omens of doom by those who dwelt in Jerusalem (Wars 6:5:3). He records, for example, that a star, shaped like a sword, hung over the city; that there was a comet that continued a whole year.
4. **Political Persecution and Unrest (vv.12-15):** The Lord warned his disciples that the preaching of the gospel would generate the antagonism of Jew (“the synagogue”) and Gentile (“kings and rulers”). As he would suffer at the hands of both, so would they. The record of Acts amply demonstrates the combined opposition of Jew and Gentile in exactly the same way as the Lord foretold: the persecution was often instigated by the Jews who then aroused the Gentiles. How true this was in the life of Paul (cp. Acts 21-26). The Lord told them that persecution would provide the Truth with a witness. Thus, instead of persecution being a discouragement, it would provide a testimony to him, and they would be strengthened, knowing that his words had come to pass (Acts 5:41). Not only so, but he would stand by and provide them with irrefutable answers (cp. Acts 4:13; 5:33; 26:31-32).
5. **Hatred and Death by Friends and Relatives (vv.16-19):** Earlier Jesus had said his coming would produce division (Lk. 12:51-53). The gospel would inevitably separate men into classes depending on their response to it. Its demands would lead to separation and dedication with the resultant rifts in families and persecution, even to the point of betrayal and death. In forewarning them, Jesus was allaying any disillusionment that might have arisen.
5. **Greatest Sign: The Armies of the Desolation (vv. 20-24):** The clearest sign that the time had come for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple would be the presence of the Roman armies. In Matthew 24:15 Jesus is also recorded as saying that these armies were the “abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the Prophet”, and that they would stand in “the holy place” or Temple. Jesus commended an understanding of Daniel, and in relating that prophecy to the Roman armies, he has sealed much of its interpretation (cp. Dan. 8:11, 12, 13, 24; 9:27).

Jesus warned the believers to flee Jerusalem when those Roman legions approached and surrounded the city. Opportunity was provided for believers to escape: Josephus and Eusebius say that the Romans made their first advance to Jerusalem under Costius Gallus, but that they withdrew suddenly in a most unexpected and impolitic way, for then the city might easily have been taken. By this means the signal was given to the Christians to flee. Because of this admonition many did, some to Pella and others to Mt. Libanus, and so they preserved their lives.

Jesus went on to say that these judgments would comprise the "days of vengeance". Earlier he had proclaimed "the acceptable year of the Lord" to Israel, but many had "done despite to the spirit of grace" in rejecting God's Son, and so vengeance would follow (Lk. 4:19; Heb. 10:26-29; Isa. 61:2).

Because he knew that famine would overtake the besieged city, and that in desperation even children would be consumed, Jesus said: "Woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days" (v.23, cp. Deut. 28:53). Subsequent history has confirmed the accuracy of these words.

He then went on to prophesy the crushing of the Jewish revolt, and of the survivors being "led away captive into all nations" (v.24). This came to pass and the Jews lived in exile for almost 1900 years, and Jerusalem during that time was trodden under the heel of a succession of Gentile oppressors. How wonderfully accurate are all of these words: not one has failed of fulfilment — prophecy has become history.

But Jesus did not say that the exile of Jewry and the downtreading of Jerusalem would continue forever: he gave a time limit: "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (v.24).

### **EVENTS PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD (Lk. 21:25-28).**

Over the last 100 years Jews have been flowing back to the holy land in accordance with the demands of prophecy (Jer. 30:10-11; Ezek. 37; Zech. 12:9-10); and on 14th May, 1948 the state of Israel was proclaimed and established by international law. But Jerusalem was not set free from the heel of Gentile oppression until June, 1967, in the "Six Day War". Thus ended that long period of Gentile oppression of Jerusalem which commenced in B.C. 333, when the city submitted to Alexander the Greek. The years between B.C. 333 and 1967 total 2300, and this is significant as this is the period allotted by God for the city's downtreading (Dan. 8:14). Surely we live in dramatic days!

Jesus went on to speak of other signs which would characterise the end of the "times of the Gentiles". He spoke of signs in the "sun and in the moon, and in the stars". These heavenly bodies are symbolical of political and religious powers, for they control the orbit and

movements of the earth in the same way as rulers govern the peoples of the earth (cp. Isa. 24:23; Joel 2:10-11, 30-31; 3:15; Isa. 1:2, 10). That political unrest and chaos is indicated by there being signs in the “sun and in the moon and in the stars” is clear from the literal phrase which follows: “and upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity”. The birth of free thinking, given impetus by the fall of the established authority of State and Church in the French Revolution (1790) has spawned the world-wide communist movement. This cause has as its dictum, “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”, and it calls upon the “workers of the world to unite” and throw off the age-old shackles of established order. Thus subversion and revolution have been fostered and exported to all countries. These are the “three unclean spirits like frogs working miracles”. A general instability and madness has confused men and nations, which are now well nigh ungovernable and the grand finale will be the “gathering of them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:13-14). Roaring seas churning up dirt and mire, speak of the restless agitation caused by subversive activities (v.25; Isa. 57:20-21).

Jesus says that the effect of such utter hopelessness will cause men’s hearts to fail or expire (R.V. Margin). There will not even be a glimmer of hope on the horizon for those who are unenlightened (v.26). At such a time of universal despair, when the great super-powers are shaping up for the last and final clash upon the mountains of Israel, “the Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory”, inflicting further fear in the hearts of those who have rejected him (Rev. 1:7).

But for the saints the growing distress will cause joy and not fear, for the day of their salvation will be nearer: “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (v.28).

### **THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE (Lk. 21:29-33).**

All of these signs would be like the shooting forth of the leaves of the fig tree, which testify that summer is nigh. But there seems to lie veiled in this sign another, for the fig tree is frequently used as a figure of Israel in the prophets (Jer. 8:13; 24:1; 29:17; Joel 1:7, 12) and especially by the Lord himself (Lk. 13:7; Mk. 11:13-14). The shooting forth of the fig’s leaves then becomes a sign that there will be life again in the “dead” trunk of Israel in these days (cp. Isa. 6:13). The re-establishment of the state of Israel is the fulfilment.

### **WARNING TO WATCH (Lk. 21:34-36).**

In view of the despair prevailing, men are pictured in the Old Testament counterpart and background to this prophecy, Isaiah chapter 24, giving themselves over to all forms of sensual pleasure (Isa. 24:6-9). This mad pleasure-seeking is soon to be turned to confusion with the great earthquake (v.1), and judgment (vv.17-22). But the danger for

the saints of the last days lies in the fact that they, too, might be ensnared in the materialism and pleasures of this affluent time. Thus the Lord gives an urgent warning to us: "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting (gluttony), and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (v.34).

In verse 35 he directly quotes Isaiah 24:17 which shows how unexpected that day will be. The awful picture of perplexity in Isaiah shows a man running for fear, falling into a pit, and emerging only to be trapped in a snare! How frightening that day will be for all who have not put on the sin-covering name of the Lord and walked in his steps! It will truly be seen then that labour in the Lord is the only labour which is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

In conclusion he counsels his brethren to watchfulness and constant prayer, so that they might not be taken off guard, and that they might stand approved before him (v.36).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- God's Word is true as evidenced by prophecies which have now become history.
- We live in the hour of judgment, following the establishment of Israel as a nation and the freeing of Jerusalem from Gentile hands.
- It is important to relate the political realities of our day to Christ's Olivet prophecy.
- We will perish if we fraternise with the world and follow its lead.
- Watchfulness and constant prayer are necessary for approval.

#### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"The Ways of Providence" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 24-26  
"Wars of the Jews" (Josephus)

#### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What warnings does Jesus give our generation in the Olivet Prophecy.*
2. *Jesus said that Jerusalem would be "trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled". How was this fulfilled in the Six Day War in 1967?*
3. *How is Isaiah 24 quoted or alluded to in the Olivet Prophecy in Luke 21?*
4. *Jesus said in the Olivet Prophecy, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth near". What did he mean?*

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *What signs did Jesus give his disciples of the coming desolation of the Temple? How were these fulfilled?*
2. *In the Olivet Prophecy Jesus gave many signs of the times before his advent in power. Show how these signs are being fulfilled today. What warnings does he give our generation?*
3. *Show how the prophecies in the Olivet Prophecy have come to pass:—*
  - a) *in the year A.D. 70 when the Temple and Commonwealth of Israel were destroyed by the Romans;*
  - b) *in these last days of the Gentiles.*
4. *Write an essay on the significance of the Olivet Prophecy to you.*

## 22. THE LAST PARABLES: HOW TO BE WISE AND FAITHFUL

“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom”

*In the Olivet Prophecy Jesus gave his disciples a number of signs of his second coming. In these final parables he outlined how his disciples should occupy themselves in his absence so that they might be prepared to meet him.*

*In the parable of the “Goodman of the House” Jesus emphasised how important it was for his servants to be watchful, for he would come at an hour when least expected. Continuing the idea of his disciples being stewards of his house, he asked the question, “Who then is a FAITHFUL AND WISE servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, TO GIVE THEM MEAT IN DUE SEASON?” (Matt. 24:45). In Matthew 25 Jesus spoke three parables, each of which answers this question.*

1. *The Ten Virgins—illustrates how to be “WISE” (25:2), and shows the need for watchfulness.*
2. *The Talents—illustrates how to be “FAITHFUL” (25:21), and lays emphasis upon the need to occupy time profitably.*
3. *The Sheep and the Goats—shows what is meant by “GIVING MEAT IN DUE SEASON” to the household and stresses the importance of co-operating and helping others.*

*The aim of this lesson is to learn what we should be doing in order to be ready when the Lord comes.*

### Matthew 25

#### 1. THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS (Matt. 25:1-13).

As this parable specifically teaches how to be truly wise, it is important for us to assess how it does this. The key is found in Jesus’ final words, “Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh” (v.13). By so saying, Jesus declares watchfulness to be a token of wisdom. However, the virgins who were “ready” also had a particular duty to do: they had to have a supply of oil on the momentous occasion of the Bridegroom’s coming.

There were ten virgins. Ten is a number representative of all (cp. Gen. 31:7; Num. 14:22; Dan. 1:20; Zech. 8:23), and here includes Jews and Gentiles (cp. v.32). The fact that five are accepted and five rejected does not indicate that half of those called will be saved; Jesus is concerned with the quality of his servants and not the proportion who attain salvation.

The foolish virgins lacked foresight and “took no oil” (v.3). They are contrasted with the wise who prepared in advance, and when

suddenly aroused, had their oil at hand. Oil in scriptural symbolism stands for the Spirit of God which enlightens the dark human heart (Ex. 27:20; Psa. 119:130). Today the oil stands for the Word of God, given by the Holy Spirit, in which is revealed the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (2 Pet. 1:19-20; 2 Cor. 4:4). We must now be wise and imbibe the gospel message, so that our characters will shine as a lamp filled with oil (cp. Matt. 5:15-16). The light is the reflection of the life of Jesus Christ revealed by all those who follow him. It will be approved by him at the judgment seat (1 Jn. 3:2; Matt. 7:21-24).

### **THEY ALL SLUMBERED AND SLEPT (Matt. 25:5).**

This statement indicates that a long period elapses before the Lord returns. Almost all the saints will have died, and only a few will be alive at his coming (1 Thess. 4:15; 1 Cor. 15:51). When called to meet the bridegroom, "all those virgins arose" and should have been prepared; so revealing that all those who know the Lord will have to give an account. The call came at midnight, the darkest hour. Thereby is emphasised the lesson that the Lord will come "suddenly" and when least expected. Anxiously they arose to trim their lamps (i.e. display their characters and works).

Desperately the foolish pleaded, "Give us of your oil for our lamps are gone out". But it was too late, and their panic shows the terrible realisation which will overtake those servants who have wasted their opportunities to serve God. The wise replied, "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you" (v.9). In this answer we are shown that when the Lord arrives it will be too late for further preparations: accounts will be closed. Now is the time when we must go to market and buy oil. We have got time now which we need to use wisely, unlike the foolish virgins. Their day of opportunity ended with their sleep and ours will end too with death or the sudden appearance of the Lord.

The oil has a price—not money but application: "Come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1).

In due course the foolish virgins come back and clamour to be let in, "Lord, Lord, open to us" (v.11, cp. 7:21) Such a request is met by dreadful words of finality: "Verily I say unto you, I know you not" (v.12). In truth he did not know them because they did not know him: their lives had not been fashioned after his example.

Jesus' parables often have Old Testament echoes. Notice how the basis of the parable is in Proverbs 21:20: "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up". He continues with another echo from the days of Noah, "when once the longsuffering of God waited" until a set time, and then He "shut the door" of the Ark and separated the wise from the foolish. In this parable Jesus said, "They that were ready went in . . . and the door was shut" (v.10; cp. Gen. 7:7, 16).



The possession of oil is not merely a comprehension of God's Word, but a study in which the heart is converted to love and serve God. "Watching", therefore, involves more than looking at the signs of the times to see how close Christ's coming may be; it is the recognition of the need to be ready to meet the Lord whenever the call comes.

It has been well said, "Procrastination is the thief of opportunity as well as time: and opportunity ends with the coming of sleep. ONLY TODAY IS OURS".

## **2. THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS (Matt. 25:14-30).**

In this parable Jesus shows that a "faithful servant" occupies his time profitably.

The word, "For", both commences a new story and also builds upon the lesson of the former one. This time a "man" who is traveling into a far country entrusts his goods to the care of his "servants", distributing them in accordance with their abilities. Jesus is "the man", and his disciples of all ages are the "servants". The goods are given with the understanding that they should be wisely used so that the maximum increase might be obtained on the day of reckoning (v.19).

As the parable unfolds, so the vital lessons emerge. The three servants are given talents in accordance with their ability (v.15). The justice of God is seen in that He expected no more than they were capable of rendering, and all, regardless of ability, are given the opportunity to serve.

### **THE GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS (Matt. 25:20-23).**

Two of the servants produced by trading a profit acceptable to the Lord. If the talent entrusted represents the gospel believed, then the increase stands for the fruits of a faithful walk in the Truth (Jas. 2:17). In the parable, the diligent servants are said to have been "faithful over a few things" (v.21). The reward was not proportional to the profit obtained but far greater: "I will make thee ruler over many things" (v.21). In this way any suggestion that salvation can be earned is put away.

### **THE WICKED AND SLOTHFUL SERVANT (Matt. 25:24-30).**

The servant who received one talent failed. It is clear that it is incumbent upon all to give of their best even if lacking in natural ability. This servant, however, "went and digged in the earth and hid his Lord's money" (v.18): he refused to work. He gained nothing and eventually lost even that which he had because he was slothful.

When the time came for him to give an answer he had his excuse already worked out; the task asked of him was "too much", and rather than run the risk of losing his deposit, he kept it safe in the earth! This was "reasonable", he reckoned, because he "feared" his

Lord knowing him to be a “hard man”, even wanting a crop where he had not sown! (vv.24-25). His Lord dismissed his reasons outright, claiming that if this was his view of him then he had all the more reason to apply himself with diligence. Even the small interest gained by investing it with exchangers would have been better than nothing at all (vv.26-27).

### **THE MEANING.**

Each servant entrusted with the Truth has certain abilities and God will expect profit and progress in accordance therewith. When a person trades with money he increases it. We must do so with the Word of God. We must help it to grow. This is done, not only by teaching it to others, but by letting it influence our lives. When we allow the power of Christ to change our lives, we are “trading profitably” with it. We cannot afford to keep the Truth wrapped up in a cloth like the slothful servant. Talents are of no value unless used profitably—in conforming our lives to Christ’s, and in bringing others to know him.

The importance of diligent service is enforced from the fate of the wicked servant: “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v.30). Bitterness, remorse and eternal death will be the lot of those who fail to live the Truth. Let us then be “doers of the word”—profitable traders—“and not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22-25).

### **3. THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS (Matt. 25:31-46).**

In this parable Jesus details what “faithful and wise servants” do in the house of their Lord: he shows what it means to provide the household with “meat in due season” (Matt. 24:25). This story is not a parable in the same way as the former two are because some parts have to be taken literally (e.g. visiting the sick, v.36).

The picture is of the final judgment in which Jesus sits upon the throne of his glory, and gathered before him are “all nations”, that is, those responsible to him drawn “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Acts 15:14; Rev. 7:9). As the shepherd of a mixed flock divides the sheep from the goats, so Jesus puts the inoffensive obedient sheep on his right hand, and the mischievous goats on the left (vv.31-33).

### **THE SHEEP (Matt. 25:34-40).**

Jesus continues and enumerates the faithful actions of the righteous. The basis of their approval lay in their love of their brethren in practical ways—things that everyone, even children, can do—they had fed the hungry, lodged the stranger, clothed the naked and visited the sick. By their works they had shown that they belonged to him. Moreover their works were not done with a consciousness of

merit. In fact they protested against their Lord's commendation of them. But he clarifies his judgment for them by pointing out that kindness shown to even the least of his brethren is reckoned as service to him! In this way the Lord encourages true servants to be shepherds and to care for the "least of his brethren"—they, too, are part of the "one body" of the mystical Christ.

### **THE GOATS (Matt. 25:41-46).**

The rejected are thrust from his left hand into "everlasting fire", a symbol of eternal death. They had not lived a life of "faith in action". They are reprov'd for not doing acts of mercy to him. They repudiate his charge on the basis that they had never seen him in need and so lacked the opportunity to do what he is now demanding! But his rejoinder confounds them: he reveals again that acts of mercy shown to the "least of his brethren" are equivalent to acts of mercy to himself! It was in every-day life, where opportunity abounds, that they had failed.

Thus judgment depends on what we do here and now! We will not change into sheep or goats in the day of judgment; we are becoming one or the other as we live our lives now!

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- The wise will prepare now, for the door will be closed when Christ comes.
- Faithful servants "trade" with the gospel by letting it influence their lives and by teaching it to others.
- Christ is served when we show acts of kindness to the least of his brethren.
- A fearful end awaits unfaithful servants.

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- "Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 32, 33, 50  
"A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Book 7, Chapter 8  
"Parables of the Messiah" (J. Carter)—Nos. 56-58

### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *Explain Jesus' statement, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).*
2. *Explain the attitude and judgment of the "wicked and slothful servant" in the parable of the Talents.*
3. *What happened to the 5 foolish virgins when the cry was made, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh"?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Give an account of the parable of the Ten Virgins and explain its meaning.*
2. *Explain the parable of the Talents. What lessons are taught in this parable?*
3. *Jesus said: "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?" (Matt. 24:45). Show how this statement is amplified in the parables which followed; namely, the Ten Virgins, the Talents, and the Sheep and the Goats.*
4. *Explain the parable of the Sheep and the Goats.*

## 23. THE LAST SUPPER AND GETHSEMANE

“Not my will but thine be done . . .”

*The first mission of Messiah was to die for the sins of the world. To do so he had to partake of the same nature as all mankind, that he might know and conquer its passions and weaknesses. Such a mission brought immense strain upon the Lord and it was in Gethsemane that this came to a climax. The thoughtful love which pervaded his manner in the preceding feast with his disciples is all the greater in that context.*

*The aim of this lesson is to understand the significance of the Memorial Feast which the Lord instituted before his death.*

### Matthew 26:1-56

#### A CONSPIRACY OF HATE (Matt. 26:1-5).

It was an anxious period for the elders of Jewry. Ever since Jesus had been in Jerusalem his popularity with the common people had increased. They had sung his praises on his entry to the city, and they had noted his decisive answers in the verbal battle with the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes. Fired by envy, the chief priests, scribes and elders came together in the house of Caiaphas to map out a plan of murder (Prov. 27:4). The Passover Feast was only two days away and they feared that Jesus might be exalted even more in the eyes of the people (cp. Jn. 6:15). They must take Jesus therefore, before the Feast day in order to avoid a protest from the people.

#### AN AROMA OF LOVE (Matt. 26:6-13).

In contrast with these dark purposes, Matthew tells us of an act of grace that took place in the house of Simon the leper in the small village of Bethany some 3 kilometres east of Jerusalem. In this simple setting Jesus found a noble example of faith and love which was to be recorded as a memorial ever after (v.13). While he dined, a woman called Mary came and poured a very precious ointment on his head (Jn. 12:3). Her action was intended as an anointing of his body for burial and was therefore the more remarkable (Matt. 26:12). No other person, not even among the twelve whom he had instructed so often, had appreciated the necessity for his death to fulfil the role of Messiah.

It was an enlightened act of devotion and deeply touched the Master. Yet, unwittingly, it was a rebuke upon those who, with greater opportunities, lacked the same perception and generosity. Led by Judas, the disciples began to criticise her action as being wasteful and neglectful of the poor (vv.8-9: Jn. 12:4-6). The beautiful odour of the ointment, so like the spirit of Mary, had filled the room; but now it had become contaminated with strife and greed. Jesus sternly con-

fronted the criticism, revealed the miserable hypocrisy behind it, and commended the faithful woman (vv.10-13).

### **FOR THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER (Matt. 26:14-16).**

This open rebuke upon Judas Iscariot appears to have been a final catalyst. It drove him from the company of love and devotion to the councils of murderers. There he covenanted for thirty pieces of silver to betray Jesus, so that they might arrest him “in the absence of the multitude” (Lk. 22:6). Leaving the chief priests with hopeful expectations, Judas went back to the twelve and awaited an opportunity to betray the Son of God.

### **THE LAST SUPPER—WHERE IS THE GUEST CHAMBER? (Matt. 26:17-19).**

How great is the love of Christ for his disciples! With Judas back in their ranks and knowing his evil intent, and bearing the stress of his approaching death, the Lord prepared his mind for the Passover. He desired to spend this time together and therefore directed only two disciples to prepare the guestchamber. He gave them vague instructions regarding its location (Lk. 22:15; Matt. 26:17-19; Mk. 14:13-15). Judas was thereby thwarted from planning an arrest at this time. Their Passover would be uninterrupted.

### **THE LORD’S SUPPER (Matt. 26:20-30).**

The Passover having been prepared, Jesus came and sat down with the twelve. They were grief-stricken by the announcement that one of them would betray him. Incredulously they all began to doubt and ask, “Lord, is it I?” “He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, **the same shall betray me**”. Judas, “**one of the twelve**” (Mk. 14:10, 17, 43), who drank from the same cup, would perpetrate the heinous crime. It was written, “mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa. 41:9; see also Psa. 55:12-14).

### **THE BROKEN BREAD.**

In the midst of the Passover meal, Jesus introduced the New Covenant: “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and break it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body’ ”. All were familiar with the details of the Passover, but here was a new approach! In place of the Passover Lamb, Jesus was now setting **his** “body” before them to eat. Later he took the cup of wine and said, “This is **my** blood of the **new** covenant”. So in a man of flesh and blood—“a body prepared” (Heb. 10:5, 8-10)—would be seen the fulfilment of the unblemished Passover lamb, and indeed of all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant (Psa. 40:6-8). John the Baptist had declared this when he said, “Behold the **Lamb of God** which beareth away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29 margin).

Under the shadow of Mount Sinai, Moses had taken a bason and sprinkled the blood of the Old Covenant upon the people of Israel. They swore their allegiance to Yahweh and their determination to be obedient (Ex. 24:3-8). Yet the prophets had foretold a New Covenant, so indicating a termination of the Old (Jer. 31:31-33; Isa. 59:20-21). The New Covenant would be "new" because, coming later, it would provide for the **forgiveness of sins** (Jer. 31:34; Isa. 27:9; Zech. 9:11), and this feature is emphasised by the Lord "my blood which is shed for many for the **remission of sins**" (v.28). His words contained a further contrast to the terms of Moses' Old Covenant. The bread and the wine were not for the twelve only, nor for just Israel, but for an unspecified "many". In this phrase Jesus joins with the Spirit in Isaiah: "by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify **many** for he shall bear their **iniquities**" (Isa. 53:11). He would be "the Saviour of **the world**", for "**whosoever** believeth" would find the remission of sins and the promise of everlasting life (Jn. 4:42; 3:15, 16; 12:32; Rom. 3:21-22; 10:11-13).

### THE CUP OF WINE.

The cup of wine that followed was a symbol of his blood (Matt. 26:27-28). Blood signifies "life" and so in this simple but poignant way, Jesus portrayed that he would "pour out his soul (life) unto death" (Lev. 17:11; Gen. 9:4; Isa. 53:12, 10). In John 6:53 he enjoined all disciples to drink of his blood if they would live: "Except ye drink the blood of the Son of man ye have no life in you!" To a staunch Jew this must have seemed abhorrent as God had forbidden the partaking of blood (Lev. 17:10-11; Deut. 12:23; Acts 15:20-22). Here then was a deliberate and dramatic contrast: the blood of the sacrifices of the Law could not take away sin, but Christ's blood could do so and also bring life! To "drink" this "blood" is to " **dwell in him and he in us**" (Jn. 6:56). His words, his principles, his life, should dwell in us, so bringing about unity with him and each other.

These emblems were given on the eve of the Lord's suffering and death (Lk. 22:15). Paul comments, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew **the Lord's death** till he come" (1 Cor. 11:23, 26). Why is such pre-eminence given to the Lord's death, when the principles of the bread and wine are seen throughout his life? It is because on the cross was seen the **final victory over sin**. As he expired Jesus said: "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30); so in his death, the principles seen throughout his life were dramatised.

The following paragraph is written in terms directly applicable to those who are "baptised into Christ". Students who have not yet reached that point in their lives can, nonetheless, consider the principles outlined and thus have their understanding enlightened.

When we meet to partake of the bread and wine our thoughts must focus on the death of the Lord. It was then that his body was "given"

for the life of the world and his blood “shed” that others may drink (Jn. 6:51; Matt. 26:28). Paul exhorts that we should examine ourselves before partaking of the emblems. To do otherwise is to “drink unworthily” and to be “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”, or to join his murderers (1 Cor. 11:27-29). If on the other hand we dwell upon the principles of his death, we shall profit and ultimately receive life eternal (Jn. 6:54-57). Christ’s people must walk in his steps; “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). The Memorial Feast is to be kept “till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26). It was Jesus himself who linked future glory with that eve of suffering, when he promised that he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until he drank it “new” with his disciples in the kingdom (Matt. 26:29).

### **GETHSEMANE (Matt. 26:36-46).**

Having concluded this unique Passover Feast with a Psalm of praise (perhaps Psalm 118), the company left the upper room and in the darkness of the night, made their way down the slopes of the Kedron Valley to a garden called Gethsemane at the base of the Mount of Olives. Judas had gone out earlier and was already mapping out with the chief priests the plan for the arrest. He was familiar with Gethsemane for Jesus “ofttimes resorted thither with his disciples” (Jn. 18:1-2; Lk. 22:39). It was a terrible hour and Jesus felt the need for strength from his Heavenly Father. He knew what the prophets had written. He knew that Judas was plotting his death and he warned the others that they would forsake him—the scriptures must be fulfilled (v.31; Zech. 13:7).

Desiring companionship Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, and entered the garden. He expressed to them the depth of his sorrows. He asked them to watch with him whilst he went off a little further to commune with his Father. His prayer was for deliverance from the dreadful cup of sufferings if it was compatible with his Father’s will, which he would not refuse, saying, “not as I will, but as Thou wilt”. There was no other way. God answered him by sending an angel, “strengthening him” (Lk. 22:43; Psa. 91:11, 14; 34:7-8). Returning to the three he found them asleep—Peter, too, who had so recently vaunted his loyalty (v.33, 35, 40). Jesus, despite his personal grief, could yet feel for them: “Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak” (v.41; cp. Rom. 7:17-23; Eph. 6:18). Three times he prayed in the same words, and returned each time to find the disciples sleeping (vv.42-44). It was the hour of his greatest grief and desolation (Psa. 69:1-4, 13-20). His sweat was abnormal, like great drops of blood falling to the ground (Lk. 22:44). Yet out of it he arose fortified by his communion with his Father, and resolute in his determination. “Behold, the Lord God will help me, who is he that will condemn me?” (Isa. 50:7-9). “Rise, let us be going” (v.46).



## **A GREAT MULTITUDE WITH SWORDS AND STAVES**

**(Matt. 26:47-56).**

Judas, "one of the twelve", arrived with the guards who did the bidding of the chief priests (cp. Jn. 7:32; Matt. 26:47). In the flickering light of torches and lanterns Judas betrayed his Master with a kiss. It was his sign to ensure that they arrested the right one (Jn. 18:3). Peter's love and anger surged to the surface. He took his sword and struck off an ear of one of the high priest's servants (v.51, Jn. 18:10). It was a loyal but uninformed action. Healing the ear, Jesus reminded Peter that twelve legions of angels were at his disposal should he so desire (Lk. 22:51; Matt. 26:53), but that it was not the hour for resistance. Moreover "all they who take the sword shall perish with the sword" (vv.52-53).

"But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him and fled" (v.56).

### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- It is easy to pass harsh judgments upon tender expressions of love which we fail to understand.
- The Memorial Meeting should be attended in a sober and thoughtful manner.
- Prayer is a great help against temptation, and we must be alert when approaching God.
- We are to "resist not evil"; vengeance is God's alone.
- "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them".

### **REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

"Nazareth Revisited" (R. Roberts)—Chapters 52 and 56  
"A Life of Jesus" (M. Purkis)—Book 7, Chapters 9, 10 and 11  
"The Gospel of the Son of God" (L. G. Sargent)—Book VII, Chapters 1-2

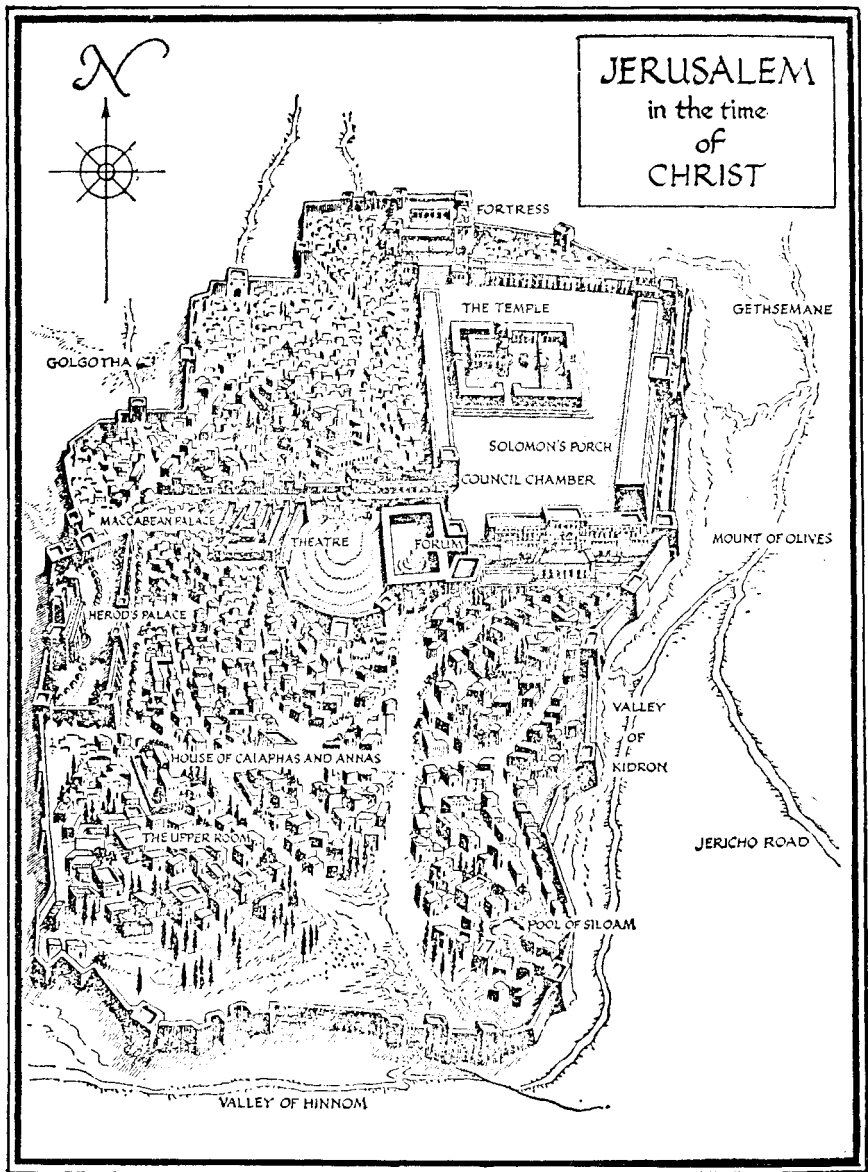
### **PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *How does the new covenant which Jesus instituted at the Last Supper differ from the old covenant given by Moses in Exodus 24?*
2. *What did Jesus mean when he said: "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt.26:28)?*
3. *What did Jesus mean when he said, "He that . . . drinketh my blood dwelleth in me, and I in him" (Jn. 6:56)?*
4. *Why did Jesus tell Peter, in the garden of Gethsemane, to put his sword back into its sheath?*

5. *How is the love of Christ for us seen in the events which took place in the garden of Gethsemane?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *What instructions have been left for those in Christ to remember Jesus week by week?*
2. *What do the bread and wine taken by Jesus and his disciples at the last supper symbolise?*
3. *Describe the events which took place in the garden of Gethsemane, including the arrest of the Lord. Include in your answer as many of his words as you can remember.*



## 24. TRIAL AND CRUCIFIXION

“He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter”

*The Apostle Paul wrote that “Christ Jesus . . . before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession”. There was in fact a series of trials, none of which revealed any sin or crime on the Lord’s part. Each was a mockery of justice. So he was taken, as an innocent Lamb to the slaughter, and by wicked hands, crucified and slain. It was “their hour and the power of darkness”. While the Father above allowed them to do their evil deed, He showed His displeasure by strange signs, and provided an honourable burial for His beloved Son.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show how great the love of God is for us in giving His Son as an offering for our sins; and to show how great were the trials and hence the obedience of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, that he might be perfect.*

**Matthew 26:57-75; 27:1-61; John 18:28-40; 19:1-18**

### **TRIALS BEFORE JEWISH ELDERS—**

#### **First Trial: Before Annas (Jn. 18:13, 19-24).**

The trial of Jesus took place in six stages, three before the Jewish elders and three before the Gentile authorities. Only John records the first stage which was before Annas, who, though deposed as High Priest by the Romans, received recognition among the Jews (e.g. Lk. 3:2; Acts 4:6). He was immensely rich and powerful and head of the Sanhedrin. Annas asked him of his disciples and doctrine. Jesus referred him to those who had heard him, for as he pointed out, he had spoken openly wherever he had gone. For this he was smitten by one of the officers. The first blow thus fell on his cheek. It was the first of many which would disfigure those noble features until he was “marrred more than any man” (Isa. 52:14). Annas then bound Jesus and sent him to Caiaphas (v.24).

#### **Second Trial: Pre-Dawn Trial Before Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57-68).**

The arrest of Jesus probably occurred in the early hours after midnight (cp. Jn. 18:3; Matt. 26:43, 74; 27:1). So Jesus was brought to trial before Jewish elders in the cold, dark fore-dawn hours. Such a trial was illegal as no capital cases were to be considered after sunset. Caiaphas had summoned a large number of loyal elders to be present to fabricate a charge “to put him to death”. They had passed their judgment before hearing the evidence.

A number of false witnesses testified but confusion reigned for they contradicted each other (cp. Deut. 17:6-7; 19:15-21). At length two came forward saying that Jesus had claimed he could destroy and rebuild the temple in three days. It seems that they were misrepresenting an earlier statement of the Lord (Jn. 2:19). Their statement

amounted to sacrilege and sorcery. Both of these charges could have been used to secure the death penalty by Jewish law. But Caiaphas needed more than that, for what did Pilate care about sacrilege and sorcery? There must be a more dangerous charge than that. Caiaphas was desperate. Time was going and nothing was emerging. In a few hours the Passover pilgrims would be filling the streets and flocking into the courts looking for the prophet from Galilee. The High Priest was in danger of losing his prisoner. The strained atmosphere was heightened by the silence and detachment of the prisoner. It was a battle of character.

The Lord stood composed and resolute in the midst of their frantic disarray. Caiaphas giped at Jesus for not responding to the charges, but he held his peace (cp. Prov. 26:4; Isa. 53:7). Feeling the strain, the high priest resorted to the law of adjuration, "Tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 26:63; cp. Lev. 5:1). Jesus' reply was a straightforward confirmation, combining the warnings of both Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13: "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven". Here was the confession Caiaphas wanted: he could now charge Jesus with blasphemy before the Jews and treason before the Romans. He led the elders in an emotional outburst. Rending his clothes, he charged that in the light of such "blasphemy" they had no further need of witnesses! Rending garments, though an approved gesture of dissociation from blasphemy, was forbidden for the high priest (Lev. 21:10)! Thus Caiaphas, standing before the true High Priest (who, in the terms of Psalm 110 so recently quoted, would vanquish his enemies and establish a new Melchizedek Priesthood), tore asunder the garments of his office and unwittingly disqualified himself! Yet for the moment his action brought its intended result. Those present rose up like puppets and pronounced the Lord "guilty of death". Then they spat upon him, buffeted his meek form, and mocked his claims. Scripture and the power of God was confirmed by these actions (Matt. 20:17-19; Mk. 10:33-34; Isa. 50:5-8).

### **Third Trial: Formal Sentencing Before Sanhedrin At Sunrise.**

Both Matthew and Mark make it clear that at sunrise a more formal and full assembly of the 70 elders was called to ratify the decision (Matt. 27:1; Mk. 15:1; Lk. 22:66). They confirmed the death sentence, but since they had not the power to inflict it, they sent Jesus bound to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate (Jn. 18:31).

## **TRIALS BEFORE GENTILE AUTHORITIES—**

### **First Trial: First Appearance Before Pontius Pilate.**

It was no accident that the Son of God was brought before the Gentile authorities. All flesh had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It was fitting, therefore, that Jew and Gentile should be accomplice in the greatest sin of human history (Rom. 3:9, 20, 23).

Moreover, scripture had foretold that they would. In Psalm 2 (quoted in Acts 4:25-26 and given an application to the first coming), it is declared that Jew and Gentile rise up and take counsel against the anointed (vv.1, 2). And the infallible word of Christ had depicted his death as a “lifting up” (Jn. 3:14; 12:32-33). Scripture and Jesus had foretold that he would die by being “lifted up”—a form of death carried out by the Romans (Jn. 3:14; 12:32-33; Isa. 11:10), as distinct from the Jewish method of stoning (cp. Jn. 18:30-32).

Pontius Pilate’s imperious manner had already riled the Jews; his inadequacies had been reported in Rome. He could lose his position if another major upheaval occurred. Thus, although Pilate could find no fault in Jesus, he wanted “to content the people” (Lk. 23:4; Mk. 15:15). In his Judgment Hall he continued to question Jesus who had been charged with a “perverting of the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King” (Lk. 23:2). These charges were very serious, and Pilate, bearing in mind his own tenuous hold on power, could ill afford to treat them lightly. Yet he did not want to yield to their demands because he knew that “**for envy they had delivered him**” (Mk. 15:10). He could scarcely believe that the battered and humble figure before Him was a mover of sedition! Besides this, his wife had brought him strange tidings, pleading that he should have no part in putting to death “this just man” for she had “suffered many things this day in a dream because of him”.

After Pilate had questioned Jesus, as recorded at length in John 18:33-38, he passed his verdict, “I find no fault in him” (Jn. 18:38; Lk. 23:4). But the Jews reacted vehemently, “He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee unto this place” (Lk. 23:5). When he found that he was a Galilean, he took opportunity to temporize. He would send him to the adjacent building to be tried by Herod Antipas. It was a fatal mistake. From that moment Pilate had become a tool of the priests, and no struggling would save him now. Under their pressure he had reopened the trial that was judicially over.

### **Second Trial: Before Herod (Lk. 23:8-12).**

Only Luke records this incident. Herod Antipas, “that fox”, sought to satisfy his curiosity about Jesus of whom he had heard so much. He hoped to see a miracle. Jesus’ disdain for this evil and sensuous man is shown by his silence: “he answered him nothing” (v.9; Lk. 13:32). Piqued, Herod set his men of war upon Jesus, who mocked his claims to royalty by placing kingly garments on him (cp. Mk. 9:33-35; Isa. 52:14; 53:3)! So Jesus was returned to Pilate and Pilate and Herod “were made friends together”.

### **Third Trial: Second Appearance Before Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:15-24; Lk. 23:13-25; Jn. 18:33; 19:16).**

Justice could not now be expected from Pilate. He had changed his

mind once and it was only a matter of time before he would yield further to the pressure of the Jews. He attempted to put Jesus forward as the prisoner to be released at Passover, for such was the custom. But the people, moved by the chief priests, refused the offer and cried out for Barabbas who had been condemned for murder and insurrection against Rome, the very crime they had baselessly brought against Christ (Mk. 15:7; cp. Isa. 53:12; Mk. 14:48)! John's record gives the details and shows the personal turmoil of the Governor as he strove to avoid the guilt of slaying an innocent man. In order to please the Jews, he had Jesus scourged. The soldiers mocked him and crowned him with thorns and dressed him in a purple robe (Jn. 19:1-3). This done, Pilate brought the beaten man before the Jews, and appealing to their humanity, said, "Behold the man!" But there was no pity. Fearing lest Pilate should weaken, the chief priests and officers cried for his blood, "Crucify him, crucify him".

Then they perceived a strategem. They would insinuate that he was disloyal to Rome if he let Jesus go; "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar (Jn. 19:12). Faced with this challenge to his allegiance to Rome, Pilate, despite his many statements of Jesus' innocence, yielded to the Jews and delivered Jesus to be crucified (Matt. 27:24).

"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'." It was a pathetic attempt to absolve himself from the crime his weakness had sanctioned. But the stain of sin cannot be so easily removed.

Others were more than willing to accept the guilt: the Jews said, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:24-25). It was a terrible prophecy: the sufferings of the Jews over the past 1900 years have their birth in the rejection of the Messiah.

## **CRUCIFIED!**

To picture the Roman soldiers driving large nails through the hands and feet of the Lord into the timber of the stake, fills one with righteous indignation. He was crucified at 9 a.m. (Mk. 15:25), outside the walls of the city at a place called "Golgotha" (or Greek "Calvary"), meaning "The Place of a Skull" (Heb. 13:12; Lev. 16:27; Mk. 15:22; Lk. 23:33). For his thirst they offered him an unpalatable mixture of vinegar and gall (Matt. 27:34; Psa. 69:21). They also crucified two thieves and placed them, one on his right hand, and one on his left (v.38; Isa. 53:12; Lk. 22:37). All joined in to ridicule the Son of God. Among his mockers were barbarous Roman soldiers, the vicious taunting priests, passers-by, and even the two thieves crucified with him (vv.36, 39, 41, 44; cp. Psa 22:6-8). After distributing his garments the soldiers sat down to watch him, like a group of savage dogs gloating over their prey (vv.35-36; Psa. 22:16-18). Pilate wrote a title "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" and set it on the cross by Jesus' limp and bleeding body (Jn. 19:19-22). The Jews wanted to rob the statement of its power by mak-

ing Pilate add the words, "he said . . . ". But Pilate with belated courage dismissed them.

The reviling failed to provoke retaliation (cp. 1 Pet. 2:23; Isa. 53:7). Jesus' mind turned to the hope of converting those who vented their hate: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). He gave a gracious promise of salvation to the repentant thief; he also made thoughtful provision for his grief-stricken mother (Lk. 23:43; Jn. 19:26-27). Such a love for others in the face of shame and suffering leaves the beholder wondering at the obedience of the Son of God. Surely he is **our example**; "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24). Jesus' actions honoured his Father: God's will was done and the flesh shown to be rightly related to death (Jn. 12:27, 28; Rom. 3:25-26).

Though it was God's will that he should die, He revealed His displeasure by sending an eerie darkness over the land as well as an earthquake (Matt. 27:50-54).

#### **BURIAL (Matt. 27:57-66; Jn. 19:38-42).**

Again the Old Testament was verified, for the two who cared for the body of Jesus were rich and respected elders (Isa. 53:9). Joseph of Arimathea, a faithful elder and hitherto secret disciple of Jesus, begged the body of Jesus from Pilate (Mk. 15:43; Lk. 23:51; Jn. 19:28). He was joined by Nicodemus, once a secret admirer of the Lord, but now a bold and open disciple. Together they lovingly embalmed the body of their Messiah, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in Joseph's own new tomb hewn in a rock. Mary Magdalene remained in the garden, beholding every detail until finally the huge stone door of the tomb was rolled into its place (vv.60-61; Lk. 23:55).

#### **LESSONS FOR US:**

- Jesus prayed that God would forgive his enemies who crucified him. So we should love those who hate us.
- As followers of Christ we too must "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts".
- If we please men we will not be the servants of God.
- "The flesh profits nothing: it is the Spirit that makes alive".
- Our first duty in life is to give glory to God for He has revealed His unlimited grace towards us in the offering of His only beloved Son (Jn. 3:16).
- "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". The love of Christ for us should constrain us to loving obedience and service.



**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

“A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 7, Chapters 12-14

“The Gospel of John” (J. Carter)—Chapters 18 and 19

“The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 12, Pages 56-134

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What charges were brought against Jesus during the course of his trial?*
2. *How was Jesus given an honourable burial?*
3. *Caiaphas rent his garments. What did this signify?*
4. *“When he was reviled, he reviled not again” (1 Pet. 2:23). How was this principle seen in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.*
5. *How was Jesus’ care for others seen when he was crucified?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Make a list of events in the trials, death and burial of Christ that were foretold in the Old Testament.*
2. *Make a summary of the trials Jesus underwent before his crucifixion. What lessons are there for us in these trials?*
3. *Write a brief essay on the shame, the suffering and the loneliness of Jesus when he was crucified.*
4. *Describe Jesus’ trial before Pilate showing how Pilate changed his mind.*
5. *Outline Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin.*
6. *What lessons do we learn from Jesus’ example on the cross?*

## 25. ALIVE FROM THE DEAD

**“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain;  
ye are yet in your sins”**

*With the above words the Apostle Paul emphasises the importance of the doctrine of Christ's resurrection. The fact of the empty tomb has shaped the course of the last two thousand years of history, and has determined the Ruler of the next one thousand years, for the glorified Lord will return and reign in righteousness and peace; God has given assurance of this “unto all men in that He hath raised him from the dead”.*

*The aim of this lesson is to show the indisputable evidence that Jesus rose from the dead, and the significance and importance of this for us.*

### **Matthew 27:62-66; Luke 24:1-47**

#### **A FINAL PRECAUTION.**

Jesus died on the Day of Preparation and the following day was a Sabbath (Matt. 27:62; Lk. 23:54). The chief priests and Pharisees were still troubled lest their plans to take Jesus should fail. Fear gripped them as they mocked him, for the heavens were darkened and the earth shook. They were further disturbed when the veil of the Temple was inexplicably rent from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51). These were ominous signs (cp. Psa. 18:6-8). If they were to succeed (against God!) then they must take every precaution. So they sought from Pilate a special guard of Roman soldiers to ensure that the sepulchre was sealed until the third day. They feared that his disciples would steal his body from the tomb and claim “the deceiver” was raised from the dead. The governor agreed to the request: “You have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can”. And so they did, rolling the stone across the doorway and setting a guard.

It is pathetic to see the leaders of the chosen nation assiduously preparing to thwart the resurrection of their Messiah! Yet their actions have served to confirm the historical truth of the resurrection of Christ. For whoever hated Jesus more than these elders? Who in all the centuries since could have been as sure to have meticulously watched the tomb? If that stone moved, then it must have been God who did it!

#### **THE WOMEN FIRST TO THE TOMB (Lk. 24:1-10).**

When the Galilean women departed from the tomb after closely observing the burying by Joseph and Nicodemus, they had resolved to return with spices and ointments to complete the embalming of the body (Lk. 23:55-56; Mk. 16:1). And so, having rested on the Sabbath, they came at early dawn (RV) of the first day of the week to the tomb,

questioning among themselves who would roll away the stone (cp. Mk. 16:3). On arrival, they found to their amazement that the stone was rolled away from the door of the sepulchre and, furthermore, that the body of their Lord was not within the tomb! Their consternation was then turned to fear for within the tomb of death two immortal angels in shining garments announced that the Lord had risen: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen!" So the tomb of death had been conquered and had become the birthplace of life (2 Tim. 1:10). Sin, the captor of all mankind, had now been led captive (Eph. 4:8; 1 Cor. 15:55). It is striking to note the angels' recognition of the Lordship of Christ, and how they refer respectfully to his earlier words concerning rising from the dead (cp. Matt. 28:6; Lk. 24:7-8).

In fear and wonderment the women hastily retraced their steps through the quiet streets of Jerusalem. They burst in upon the company of the sad and disillusioned disciples (cp. Mk. 16:10). The news was too good to be true, and so the report of the excited women "seemed to them as idle tales and they believed them not!" (v.11).

Peter, however, probably accompanied by John (cp. Jn. 20:3-4), set off for the tomb to see for himself. There in the darkness of the tomb he could see the linen graveclothes neatly placed on one side; yet he departed unconvinced despite the fact that Jesus many times had spoken to them about his resurrection (Mk. 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34).

### **THE STRANGER ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS (Lk. 24:13-35; Mk. 16:12).**

The sadness that swept the company of the disciples soon turned to disillusionment. All their hopes had centred on this Jesus of Nazareth: he was the victorious Messiah promised. They had seen him taken and crucified; now they knew not even where his body lay (Jn. 20:2). Their respect for him was now mixed with dashed hopes, and they began with heavy hearts to depart from Jerusalem. Two disciples were making their way to Emmaus, a small village some 11 kilometres from Jerusalem, when a stranger joined them and enquired what melancholy affairs they were so intensely discussing (Lk. 24:13-17). One of them, Cleopas, was surprised that the stranger was unaware of the dramatic events of recent days that had filled Jerusalem—concerning one, Jesus of Nazareth, "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people", and how the Jewish rulers had delivered him to be crucified. Cleopas openly stated their former belief, "we trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel". Since this was now the third day since Jesus' crucifixion, they had lost faith in his Messianic claims. Yet there was a ray of hope in that certain women had reported a vision of angels at the tomb and claimed to have received a message that Jesus was alive! However, others of their company had not been able to find him although they had found the tomb empty as reported (vv.19-24)!

The visitor listened with great interest until Cleopas had finished his narration. Then he said unto them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ (Gk. for "Messiah") to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" Then in a grand and masterly way, the stranger expounded unto them the facts of Messiah from Moses and all the prophets. They were elated and spellbound. This awe-inspiring oration must have been one of the greatest in history. Israel's Old Testament scriptures abound with references to a glorious King who would exalt the nation and bring righteousness and peace to all (Num. 23:21; 24:17-19; 2 Sam. 7; Psa. 2; Mal. 4:1-2). So much Israel knew and they awaited its fulfilment. Yet with equal clarity those same scriptures speak of a lowly one who would suffer and die for sin, and then rise from the dead (Ex. 12; Psa. 22, 69, 118; Isa. 42, 50, 53; Zech. 13:7; Dan. 9:26). The early work of Messiah was not understood. Prophets and angels had enquired into the meaning and sequence of these two great facets of Messiah's work (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Jesus, however, had repeatedly told them about his coming humiliation, death and resurrection; blindness prevented them accepting these things. Now he was with them, newly risen from the grave, expounding the very things they had seen and heard him speak about during those last momentous days!

Hour followed quickly upon hour and the company reached Emmaus as evening was falling. Cleopas and his partner successfully constrained the "stranger" to abide with them. There was something comely and appealing about him. Though he had indicted their ignorance, his flowing discourse had rekindled their hopes in Jesus (v.32). So they desired his company for the evening, and the three sat down at meat together (cp. Heb. 13:2; Jn. 14:23; Rev. 3:20). Mark tells us that on this occasion Jesus appeared in "another form" (16:12). It was not until he took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave to them, that they knew it was their Lord! Often before they had witnessed his reverent presiding over the breaking of bread (Mk. 6:41; 8:6; 14:22).

The Lord's appearance was irrefutable evidence that he had risen from the dead. After being recognised he vanished from their presence, leaving them in sheer elation: "Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" (v.32). They immediately set out on the dark road back to Jerusalem to carry the wonderful news to the disciples.

### **JESUS APPEARS IN THE MIDST OF THE DISCIPLES (Lk. 24:33-43).**

On arriving in Jerusalem, Cleopas and his companion found the disciples alive with the fact that "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (cp. 1 Cor. 15:5)! Joyfully they added to the evidence with their own experiences. Suddenly as they spoke who

should appear in the midst of them but the Lord himself! Seeing their apprehension he said unto them, "Peace be unto you . . . 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" (vv.36-39; 1 Jn. 1:1-2; cp. 1 Cor. 15:50). They gazed upon the hands and feet so recently pierced, so symbolising the coming conversion of Israel (v.10; Zech. 12:10). It was simply too wonderful to be received by doubting human hearts. So while they "yet believed not for joy", Jesus requested food and ate before them, to verify his physical presence and life (vv.41-43).

Thomas must have been absent from this first meeting, but eight days later he was persuaded also and expressed his conviction in the risen Son of God with the words, "My Lord and my God" (Jn. 20:24-28; cp. Jn. 10:34-36). His initial doubts only serve to emphasise the fact that the Lord had risen indeed.

## **RESURRECTION OF CHRIST—FOUNDATION STONE OF THE GOSPEL.**

The importance of the doctrine of resurrection cannot be over-emphasised. To deny it is to overturn the gospel, for without it there is no hope: "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" (1 Cor. 15:14-18; 2 Tim. 2:16-18). It was the basis of apostolic preaching. Without Christ's death the lusts of the flesh could not have been overcome, nor would the Father's righteousness for the remission of sins have been declared. The resurrection of Christ was the Father's spontaneous response to the perfect obedience of His Son (1 Pet. 1:21). It was not possible that the Righteous One should be held by the pains of death (Acts 2:24). Thus was forged the pathway to life through the grave (1 Tim. 6:16; Jn. 5:26). Life eternal can only be found through the Name of the risen Christ (Acts 4:12). Baptism identifies the believer with the burial and resurrection of Christ: "we are buried with him by baptism into his death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12-13; 3:1; Jn. 3:5).

In this age of foolish conjecture it is good to observe the great confidence that the apostles placed in the resurrection of Christ. They boldly asserted: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses". These words were addressed to the only generation which could have disputed the fact, and whose leaders had every desire to do so (Acts 2:32). But they were silent. The apostles made many other bold and unchallenged declarations of the resurrection of the Lord (Acts 2:24; 3:15, 26; 4:10, 33; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 33; 26:26). We can rest confidently on the fact that the Lord has risen and our faith in him and in his return as King over the earth is not in vain.

**LESSONS FOR US:**

- The resurrection of Christ turned sorrow into joy for doubting disciples. It can do the same for us today.
- It is not the wise and prudent of this world who seek the power of the resurrection: humble women and fishermen were the first to believe.
- We must not be “fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (Lk. 24:25).
- The resurrection of Christ is the foundation fact of the gospel and of history. There is no wisdom in any system of thought which is not founded upon it.

**REFERENCE LIBRARY:**

- “A Life of Jesus” (M. Purkis)—Book 8, Chapters 1 and 2
- “Nazareth Revisited” (R. Roberts)—Chapter 59
- “The Story of the Bible” (H. P. Mansfield)—Vol. 12, Pages 150-158

**PARAGRAPH QUESTIONS:**

1. *What action did the rulers take regarding the body of Jesus? How does this strengthen our belief in his resurrection?*
2. *When the disciples saw the wounds in Jesus’ hands and feet they believed. How does this foreshadow the conversion of Israel?*
3. *What does the death and resurrection of Christ symbolise for the believer?*
4. *What is the significance of the resurrection of Christ?*

**ESSAY QUESTIONS:**

1. *Write an essay on the sequence of appearances Jesus made after his resurrection (as in Luke 24).*
2. *Give an account of the events that followed when Jesus joined the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. How did their understanding of the Messiah differ from his explanation of his Messiahship?*
3. *What evidence is there for believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead? What difference should this make to our lives?*
4. *Write an account of the events which took place when the women came to the tomb of Christ on the first day of the week.*