

Sermons  
from  
Matthew

The Voice of Truth Radio Series

J.C. Choate

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# Introduction

When brother Choate asked me to write the introduction to his book, **Sermons from Matthew**, I considered this request a great privilege, and I am happy to be able to do so.

I have been blessed in many ways by being associated with the Choates and knowing and seeing how diligently they work in serving their Father in heaven. I pray continually that brother Choate and his family will be blessed in such a way as to keep this great work for the Lord progressing.

The most prominent blessing which came from this association is probably the opportunity to accompany brother Choate for a session of his work in this part of the world.

I have seen the dedication, time, and effort brother Choate has exerted in putting the material of this book into existence. After reviewing it, I have no doubt that anyone who will take the time and effort to read, study, and consider seriously the material in this book will find it beneficial, along with being based upon the word of God. It contains the power of the word, the power that can bring salvation to all people. Not only has this power been utilized through the printed page, but also has been broadcast throughout most of Asia.

This book is now in your possession, and I pray that it will be used to God's glory.

Russell Leo Maynard

# Foreword

What do you think of when I speak of sermons from Matthew? If you are familiar with the books of the New Testament, you know that I have reference to sermons that are based on the writings of that book. It is the first book of our New Testament and gives an eye-witness account of the life of Christ. Being inspired of God, Matthew traces the story of Christ from His birth to His death, burial, and resurrection. He tells of some of the things that took place after His birth, and then gives us some of the details concerning His personal ministry.

In preparing this series of sermons, I went through Matthew and chose 24 subjects that I felt would serve as some of the highlights of this great book. There are lessons on the temptations of Christ, the sermon on the mount, the value of the soul, etc.

We have in the writings of Matthew the very essence of what Christianity was going to be like once it became a reality. This happened after the Lord's death, burial and resurrection when the gospel was preached for the first time on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem, A.D. 33. From that time to this, the teachings and principles set forth in this book have been translated into living Christianity by thousands and even millions of people.

I would personally like to invite you to read these sermons, along with the entire book of Matthew, and see if they don't have a profound impact on your life. Of course they are designed and presented with the prayer that you will become a believer in Christ and obey His teachings so that you might be like Him in all that you do and say.

J. C. Choate

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## Lesson 1

# The Temptations of Christ

In Matthew 4:1-11 we have this reading concerning Jesus: *“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*

*“Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, If you are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: He shall give His angels charge over you, and, In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. Jesus said to him, It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.*

*“Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve. Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.”*

Here we have a face to face confrontation between Christ and the devil, good versus evil. This was the first and last time that they would meet in this manner. There were, no doubt, many other times when the Lord was tempted by Satan, especially when He was faced with the cross itself, but even then the devil

was not so brazen as to come to Christ as he did on this occasion. This was the time for testing, of showing strength or weakness. Everything depended on whether Christ would be victorious or whether He would be defeated. Of course we know that Christ was victorious and the devil fled from Him. We can draw many valuable lessons from this story that will help us in our battles against Satan. Let us observe some of them.

We read where Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. This evidently means that the Holy Spirit guided or directed Jesus to do this. The time had come for Christ to meet the devil, Satan, or the evil one, in a head-on encounter. To be tempted meant that He would be enticed to do wrong, to receive some pleasure or gain, to submit or to give into the wishes of another. This would take place in the wilderness or in a secluded desert area.

While Jesus was in the wilderness, He fasted forty days and nights. Can you imagine doing that? What would it do to you and me to fast that long? We know that when we miss a meal or two, we are more than ready to eat. This, no doubt, made Jesus very weak physically, but evidently it was the means of sustaining Himself spiritually. When one makes up his mind that he is going to give up food for a period of time, it can at the same time give him inner strength, and obviously this is what happened when Jesus fasted and faced the devil.

It was at the point when Jesus was very hungry that the devil came to Him. He did not come to help Him but to tempt Him, to entice Him, to encourage Him to give in to Satan's wishes. Please note that even as Jesus is portrayed as a real, living, historical character, the devil is also portrayed in the same manner. Neither of them are myths or make-believe characters. They

were — and are — real-life personalities. They do not dwell in the flesh at this time, but still they live on spiritually, and each has an impressive following.

Observe the way the devil approached Christ. Of the three temptations he placed before the Lord, he began two of them by saying, *"If You are the Son of God..."* He was saying that you may be the Son of God or you may not be, but if you are, then you can prove it by doing this or that. Satan knew that Christ was the Son of God but he was using the little word "if" so as to question His divinity and therefore to tempt Christ to prove it. He thought that this might be the means of causing the Lord to give in and to do the very thing Satan wanted Him to do, and thus to succumb to temptation. However, the Lord didn't really need to prove anything to him and therefore didn't give in.

The devil knew that Christ was very hungry and so he began by appealing to the weakness of the flesh. He suggested that if He was the Son of God He should command the stones around Him to become bread. Jesus could have easily done this, but He didn't. He responded by quoting the word of God when He said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* He recognized that there was the physical side, but there was also the spiritual side, which was far more important.

The devil then took the Lord to the Holy City, evidently Jerusalem, and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, suggesting that if He was the Son of God He should cast Himself down. He also quoted the scripture by reminding Christ that it was written that God's angels would bear Him up lest at any time He should dash His foot against a stone. Christ responded with another scripture which said, *"You shall not tempt the Lord your God."*



The devil then took Christ to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and explained that, if He would fall down and worship him, he would give Him all of those kingdoms. Christ quickly rejected the devil's offer and told him to leave, as He said, "*For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.*" The devil should have realized that Christ already had power over the kingdoms of the world and certainly didn't need to bow before him to increase that power.

The devil was defeated in all these instances, and evidently he felt there was nothing else he could do to bring about the Lord's downfall. Therefore he left. At this point the angels came and ministered to Christ. Christ was victorious over Satan and the Father showed His approval by sending angels to take care of His needs.

Now, let us get a little more specific and note some points that can be helpful to us with our encounters with the devil.

First, please realize that the devil, or Satan, lives today and that he continues to tempt people. Peter warns us, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). He will not come to you or me in a physical form, that is, introducing himself as the devil or Satan, but he will come in subtle ways. He comes to tempt, to deceive, to mislead. Beware of him and his devices.

Second, Satan always comes to us at our weakest point. Taking advantage of us while we are weak physically or spiritually. It is then that he hopes to overcome us and to make us his servants for his own purposes.

Third, we will not be able to overcome Satan through our own efforts or strengths. If we are wise, we will look to the Lord for help. With Him and His word, we will be able to defeat Satan.

Fourth, remember that the Lord can give us far more than Satan can ever give us. Those things that Satan may tempt us with are of the flesh, the world, and they are carnal. They will not last. They will finally be destroyed (1 John 2:15-17). That which Christ offers is right, good, and eternal. Christ is not trying to destroy us but to save us in this world and to give us the hope of eternal life.

Fifth, when we reject the devil he will leave us. James says, *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7).

If you are not a Christian, you are at the mercy of Satan. He has you in his grip and his intention is to destroy you eternally. Are you willing to allow this to happen? There is a way out, you know, and only one way out. If you will believe in God, and believe in Christ as God's Son; if you will repent of your sins and turn away from them; if you will confess Christ as the Son of God; if you will be baptized, immersed in water, for the remission of your sins, then the Lord will save you and add you to His church. As such, you will not only be delivered from Satan, but as you continue to be faithful to Christ, He will be with you and keep you out of Satan's reach.

## Lesson 2

# Sermon on the Mount

Jesus Christ is known as the world's greatest teacher. Being from God, and being the Son of God, He was able to bring the message of God to man. Knowing man and his needs, He was in a position to present the kind of lessons that man needed.

Being the master teacher that He was, He resorted to various methods of teaching. He taught publicly, privately, through parables, by example, and so on. It is said that He taught as "*one having authority*" (Matthew 7:29). We are also told that great multitudes followed Him wherever He went (Matthew 12:15).

In Matthew 5-7 we have recorded what is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. It was on this occasion that Jesus taught the disciples and the multitudes that followed Him into this mountainous area of Galilee. The sermon itself covers a wide range of subjects. Words of encouragement are spoken, hypocrisy is condemned, the law of Moses and the teachings of Christ are contrasted, admonitions are given, questions are answered, and many points are cleared up. There is a wealth of material to be found in these three chapters. Although it is a short sermon, the gist of Christianity is plainly set forth in the words spoken on this historic occasion.

In this particular study we want to touch the highlights of this sermon. We will begin by reading the first twelve verses of Matthew 5: "*And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed are the*

*poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

Jesus is suggesting that those who possess the foregoing traits have reason to be happy and they will be blessed by God. He reminds them that if they are persecuted for righteousness' sake, they should not return evil for evil, but rejoice in knowing that the prophets before them were also persecuted and that in the end God will bless them for their faithfulness to Him.

Continuing the sermon, Christ told them, "*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:13-16).

In this section Jesus is showing the disciples how important each one of them was to Him and His cause. He compared them

to salt, which flavors and preserves, and to a light, which dispels the darkness and the evils of the night. Likewise, they were to influence those around them and glorify the Father in heaven.

Next, Christ shows the importance of the law, but also shows that it will be fulfilled. He says, *“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:17-20).

Christ and the disciples at that time were living under the Law of Moses, but that law would soon be replaced. There are two ways to handle a contract: by destroying it or by fulfilling its terms. Christ chose to fulfill the law, and did. We are therefore no longer living under the Law of Moses but under the Law of Christ.

From Matthew 5:21 through verse 48, Christ spoke to the crowd about the teachings of the law and then contrasted them with His teachings. The Law of Moses was primarily a set of laws or rules that were to be outwardly kept. On the other hand, the teachings of Christ not only dealt with the outward man, but more importantly, they dealt with the inner man, the spiritual man. His teachings therefore were more demanding and more rewarding.

In Matthew 6, Christ exhorted the disciples not to be like the hypocrites in their prayers and alms; that is, that they should not make their prayers to God and give their alms to the poor to merely be seen of men. He then gave them a prayer of example. Most people call this the Lord's prayer, but it was not *His prayer* in particular, but a model prayer that He suggested in an effort to teach people how to pray. At that time the kingdom, or church, had not come, and yet He instructed them to pray for the coming of the kingdom. This within itself would make it impossible for us to pray the same prayer today since the kingdom, or church, has already come (Acts 2:47; Hebrews 12:28).

Other lessons are taught on forgiving one another and the place of fasting in one's life (Matthew 6:14-18). Christ shows that we cannot expect the Father to forgive us if we refuse to forgive those who sin against us. Then He points out the fact that when one fasts it should not be done to be seen by men but by God.

The next part of the Lord's sermon has to do with laying up treasures. Christ says that the treasures we lay up on earth will perish, but the treasures we store up in heaven cannot be stolen or destroyed. He reminds us that we cannot serve two masters, that we will love one and hate the other. And finally, He shows how God cares for the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, and that if He would do that for them, surely He will also provide for His own. Jesus sums up the lesson by saying, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*" (Matthew 6:33,34).

In Matthew 7 He begins by saying, "*For with what judgment*

*you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, Let me remove the speck from your eye; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye"* (Matthew 7:1-5). In these verses, Jesus is not condemning judging under proper circumstances. But He is saying that if you are condemning someone for doing something wrong, while you are guilty of the same or worse things, then in condemning him you are also condemning yourself. That's why He said, "***Judge not, that you be not judged,***" and He concludes with the admonition to straighten up one's own life and then you can see clearly to help correct the problems in your brother's life.

In the remainder of Matthew, chapter 7, the Lord makes numerous points. Among these He says, "*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*" He is showing that when we put forth an effort, asking, seeking, and knocking, complying with the Lord's conditions, He will not turn us away empty-handed. He then gives the principle that we call the golden rule, "*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12). In other words, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This is the very essence of the religion of Christ, as it had also been the heart of the old law.

Jesus completes the sermon, as recorded in Matthew 7, by discussing the broad way and the narrow way, that one leads to hell and the other leads to heaven. He warns that we should beware of false prophets, that a tree is known by the fruit it bears.

Only those who do the will of the Lord will be eternally saved. Contrasting the two builders, the one building on the rock represents the person who obeys God, and the one who builds upon the sand represents the sinner who refuses to obey God.

After presenting all of these great lessons, we read, “ *And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Matthew 7:28,29).

I hope that you are impressed by the teachings of Christ as set forth in this sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, and I would encourage you to take your Bible or New Testament and read it again and again as set forth in Matthew 5-7. As you read, think about all that Christ has said and all the blessings that can come through applying these teachings to your life.



## Lesson 3

# The Salt of the Earth

In Matthew 5:13 we read the words of Jesus when He said to His disciples, *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."* What is Jesus saying here? Why would He call His disciples the salt of the earth?

Of course, Jesus was the Master Teacher and to make His point, He often used illustrations. He compared His disciples to the salt of the earth. To appreciate that, we first must know what salt is, what its qualities are, what it does. Salt is defined as being "a white crystalline substance that consists of sodium and chlorine and is used in seasoning foods. It serves to cure and to preserve." It is also used to purify and to bring out flavor.

Salt is very important. It is essential to health, and it is therefore needed all over the world. Without it, man would suffer. The same is true with Christians. Christians are needed everywhere to help their fellowman, to have a good influence, to do good works, to preach and teach the gospel of Christ, and to change things for the better.

Salt is not found everywhere. It is found only in certain areas and has to be transferred to the rest of the world. There are many countries today where there are no true Christians. The people of these countries are in sin and in need of salvation. As long as there is no one that will go to help them, they will continue to be lost. That is why Jesus commanded His people to take the gospel into all the world (Mark 16:15,16). Whether man is aware of his

need or not, he still needs the gospel, and Christians, carrying the gospel message, are their best hope.

Imitation or adulterated salt is not beneficial to anyone. There are many who pass themselves off as Christians, but they often represent man-made organizations and end up leading good people astray instead of helping them. But what the world needs today is pure New Testament Christianity. That is the only kind of Christianity that you may read about in the word of God. When God's will is respected and obeyed it produces Christians, and Christians only. If something else is produced, then it is fake and rejected by the Lord.

Salt is generally inexpensive. Christians do not put a price on their services. They do good wherever they go, not because they are being paid for it, but because they love the Lord and the souls of men. They count it as an opportunity and a blessing to be able to do whatever they can in service to their fellowman.

Salt is used to purify. Christians are likewise to be pure and to bring purity to the lives around them through their influence. In obeying Christ they have been forgiven of all their past sins. That means that they are saved, that they are whole and complete. Peter wrote, *"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"* (1 Peter 1:22,23). Speaking of Christ, Paul wrote concerning Him, *"...who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works"* (Titus 2:14). This purity not only involves the soul but also one's thoughts, speech, body, social contacts, etc. One is to be pure in

doctrine, in name, in worship, and in everything that pertains to life and godliness. It is only then that one can be Christ-like and therefore represent Christ. As such, one is able to influence others for good. Christ summed it up when He said, *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5:8).

Salt cures and preserves. It keeps things from spoiling, decaying, and from having to be destroyed. This is true with meat and many other products. Christians, in following Christ, are preserved and kept from sin and the corruption in the world. Christ encourages us to live apart from sin as far as possible. John says, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever"* (1 John 2:15-17).

To remain free from sin, Paul exhorts us to *"abstain from every form of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5:22). He also says, *"For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness"* (1 Thessalonians 4:7). Peter writes, *"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul"* (1 Peter 2:11).

Finally, hear the words of Christ: *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10). Then these words: *"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city"* (Revelation 22:14). As the foregoing scriptures indicate, as long as the Christian remains true to the Lord he will be blessed and preserved by God and for God, both in this world and in the world to come.

Also, Christians in the world have been the means of preserving the world up to this time. It is through their godly living, having an influence on the lives of others, encouraging laws that are in keeping with God's will, and in so many other ways being able to change attitudes and gain the respect of society in general, that the world has been spared from total destruction. If there were no Christians in the world, then man would become so wicked that he would have to be destroyed. If there were no Christians to represent Christ and His way, there would be no purpose in allowing the world to go on.

Salt is used for seasoning to bring out the flavor in food. Christians are to mix and mingle among people in general so as to have a good influence on them. If all do not choose to obey God, at least through Christians the Lord is represented in the world. This tends to keep man, as a society, from swinging too far away from God and into abject evil. Christians are in the world but they are not to be of the world. They are to influence those of the world instead of allowing the world to influence them. While they are to reject the ways of the world, they are not to become hermits, living in monasteries, isolating themselves from the rest of mankind in cities, colonies or countries. That is, they do not desire to gather or group themselves together to live apart from all others. Rather, they are to live among people in general, to be friends with their neighbors, and to seek to have a good influence on those around them. They are to take the gospel of Christ into all the world (Mark 16:15,16).

Salt, then, is most important. How would we be able to survive without it? At the same time, if salt has lost its power or strength or its qualities, how can it be made salty again; what can be done to restore its saltiness? Christians are in the world today.

They are saved people and as such they have the Lord abiding in them, giving them strength and power (Matthew 28:19,20). But this remains true only as long as they remain faithful to Christ. Should they reject Him, deny Him, go off into sin, then Christ will leave them and one day deny them before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:33). That means that it is possible for them to lose their strength and power for good. As such, they are worthless; that is, as long as they continue in the state of sin. There is only one way for them to return to their former position in this world and that is through repenting of their sins, confessing their faults, and asking the Lord, and those they have sinned against, to forgive them. James tells us, "*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*" (James 5:16).

Salt that is powerless and worthless is good for nothing and, therefore, must be cast out to be trodden under the foot of man. This is an expression to describe just how worthless it is. It may still be a substance, an ingredient, a chemical, but without the qualities it once had it can no longer be used for its original purpose. The same is true with the unfaithful Christian. While faithful to God, a Christian has a work to do, a purpose for existence, and is able to influence others for good. But once sin is allowed to control his life, Christ ceases to live in him, and his influence is destroyed. He is worth nothing to the Lord. He is no longer a worker, no longer preaches the gospel, no longer has the respect of his fellowman, and is therefore despised and rejected. Above all, he is rejected by the Lord, and one day, unless he repents and returns while there is time, he will be cast into hell itself to be eternally destroyed (Matthew 25:46).

Would the Lord classify you as the salt of the earth? If not, then you are not what you should be. If you are not a Christian, the Lord invites you to become one. You may do so by believing in God, and Christ as the Son of God, repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God and being baptized for the remission of your sins. Christ said, *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). In saving you, Christ will add you to His church so that you might live and serve Him all the days of your life and that you might one day have a home in heaven. That is how you become the salt of the earth.

## Lesson 4

# The Light Of The World

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp-stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:14-16).

The word light means "something that makes vision possible, brightness, daylight, that which illuminates". The opposite of light is darkness, and the two are often referred to in an effort to illustrate and contrast their extremes.

The New Testament pictures light as that which represents God, Christ, Christianity, and that which is good and right. Darkness portrays Satan and that which is of the world and is therefore bad, wrong, evil, and ungodly.

The Apostle John wrote, *"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5). James tells us, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). Paul said of the Ephesian Christians, *"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light"* (Ephesians 5:8). To the Philippian Christians, Paul wrote, *"...that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the*

world" (Philippians 2:15). Again, Paul wrote to the brethren at Thessalonica, *"You are the sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness"* (1 Thessalonians 5:5). Now listen to Peter's description of the Christians of his time: *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (1 Peter 2:9). Finally, hear the Apostle John as he says, *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7).

In contrast to light, let us now read some verses of scripture that refer to darkness. Paul wrote the Romans, *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light"* (Romans 13:12). Paul exhorted the Ephesian Christians, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"* (Ephesians 5:11). Again he said, *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6:12). The Apostle John said, *"Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes"* (1 John 2:8-11).



You can easily see the implications set forth, with light representing the Lord and His people, and with darkness representing the wicked and their ways. One is good and the other is bad, one is wise and the other unwise.

Jesus said to His disciples while He was with them on earth, *"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life"* (John 8:12). Again He said, *"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world"* (John 9:5). In John 12:46, Christ affirmed, *"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."* How was it that Christ was the light of the world? Because He came from the source of all light, God Himself. He brought truth into this world, that which opens eyes and delivers from darkness. He encouraged all mankind to leave sin, to obey His teaching, and to always do that which is good and right. Of course, He died on the cross that man might be saved from sin and thereby be delivered from darkness. Through His death on the cross, He made it possible for man to be saved in this world. Through His grace and mercy, He gave man the hope of eternal life.

In the beginning of our study, Jesus told the disciples, *"You are the light of the world"*. What did He mean by that? Since Jesus was the light of the world, by accepting and following Him, the apostles would be connected to the source of all life, Christ Himself, and thereby they would reflect His light. There are many things about light that we need to keep in mind:

1. Light makes it possible for one to see where he is going, and to miss the pitfalls along the way. This is also true in spiritual matters.

2. Light comes from some source of energy or power. Literally, it comes from fire, or from electric power, or from some other energy. Spiritually, it comes from God and Christ, the source of all truth.

3. As long as an object is in contact with the proper source of energy it will continue to give forth light. As long as we are in proper contact with Christ, we will be able to let our light shine.

4. Light dispels darkness. Christ said, *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God"* (John 3:19-21).

5. Light and darkness cannot dwell together. Neither can one walk in light and darkness at the same time, spiritually.

6. Light attracts and gets attention. Even those who are evil are aware of the light. Those who want it are drawn to it.

7. Light is needed by all. Christ and His teaching are needed by all people everywhere. That is why Christ commanded the Apostles to take the gospel into all the world (Mark 16:15,16).

8. Light can be extinguished. A candle can be put out, an electric light bulb can be turned off, etc. Also, the follower of Christ, who is a light for Christ in the world, can so conduct himself that his light ceases to shine.

There are, no doubt, many other points we could make on this subject, but perhaps enough has been said for us to be

impressed with the fact that Jesus wanted His followers to be the light of the world. Without the presence of Christians, and the light of God shining through them, there would be no light, only darkness. This places special emphasis on the necessity of Christians letting their lights shine.

Jesus also said that His disciples would be as a city set on a hill — it cannot be hidden. If you have travelled over the country, especially at night, you know that often times you can see a city in the distance, on a hill, with its lights shining brightly. That city stands out and because of it we are attracted to it, and can easily go to it. Jesus said that as His followers, as lights of the world, we are like a city that is set on a hill that cannot be hidden. We are, therefore, in a position to draw those who are in darkness to the light. Of course, He works through us to draw souls unto Himself.

Next, Christ illustrates the importance of light by saying that a candle is lit, not to hide it or to put it out, but that it might give light unto all that are in the house. Today we might use the electric light bulb to illustrate this point. The switch is not turned on only to illuminate the bulb, or to switch it off, but it is turned on so that it might provide light for all that are in the house. Likewise, when we come in contact with Christ, obey His teachings, and become children of light, we are not to do anything that would cover up or prevent our light from shining. Sin will put it out. Wrong-doing will put it out. But we are not to do anything that would put out our light. We should, rather, let it shine so that it might provide light for those who are around us. In other words, we can use our light to bring others to the light of the world, who is Christ. That's our purpose in the first place.

Finally, Christ admonishes us to let our light so shine before

men that they might see our good works and through such to glorify our Father in heaven. When we do good works, we are letting our light shine. We do not do them to merely be seen of men, or to receive their praise, but rather we are to do good works so that when men see them, they may glorify the Father in heaven.

My friend, if you are in sin, you are in darkness. If you are not a Christian you do not have God's light. I would therefore like to encourage you to obey God so that you might be a Christian and might walk in the light.

## Lesson 5

# The Prayer of Example

In the first part of Matthew, Chapter 6, Christ deals with the problem of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is pretending or acting like you are something when you are not. He gives two specific examples and then offers the remedies.

The first example has to do with giving alms to the poor. It seems that there were some in that day who would give to the poor, but before doing so they would sound a trumpet in the synagogues and in the streets to get the attention of those around them, and then they would give their alms or their money. Jesus said, *“Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly”* (Matthew 6:2-4).

As you can see, Jesus was not condemning the practice of helping to the poor. He found fault, rather, with that person who was giving for the wrong motive. The person Jesus pictures here was not giving because it was his duty to give, or because the poor needed help — although he pretended to be doing it for these reasons — but his real reason for giving was to get attention, to have the praise and glory of men. Jesus said that if that was one’s motive then the praise of men would be his only reward, that certainly God would not reward him for such an act.

He pointed out to the disciples that when they gave to the poor they should not let their left hand know what their right hand was doing. This was a saying or principle of that time which simply meant they were not to advertise what they were doing, that it was to be kept secret. Furthermore, they were not to do this to get attention but to help the poor. In so doing, the poor would benefit, and the Father in heaven would be aware and would bless them accordingly.

The second example that Jesus referred to concerned prayer. He said, *"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him"* (Matthew 6:5-8).

Once more Jesus is describing a person who is looking for the praise and glory of men. Such a person is pretending to be very religious, a believer in prayer, and one who practices such, even to the point of praying long prayers. But his motive is not to speak to the Father, to have His blessings, but that those around him might talk about him as being such a religious person. Jesus condemned this hypocrisy. He did not condemn prayer. Instead, He stressed the fact that, if one was sincere in prayer, it would not be necessary to pray in public. Rather, one should find some secret place for praying. He goes on to point

out that God would see him there and would reward him openly. Again, Jesus stated that if one was honest and sincere in his prayers, it would not be necessary to pray long, repetitive prayers. Since God already knew their needs, He could as easily answer a brief prayer as a long one.

Although Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the long ago, we would do well to profit from the lessons He taught them. Hypocrisy was not only condemned by the Lord of that day, but He would condemn the same practice in our lives today. This is something that has plagued people in all periods of time. Sometimes hypocrites can be easily detected, since they are very poor actors. Others are good at it, and they appear to be very sincere, very pious, very religious, when in reality their motives are impure. But whether we, as onlookers, know or not, the hypocrites know their real motives, and God knows. My friend, don't pretend to be something you are not. Be honest and sincere in what you do. You may be wrong even then, but at least be honest and sincere about it. Better still, learn the truth of God's will and sincerely obey it. Only then can you have the assurance that God will bless you for it.

In Luke's version of these matters, the record says, "*And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples*" (Luke 11:1). He proceeds to give them a prayer as an example. This same prayer is given in Matthew 6:9-13. In this case, after Jesus had condemned hypocrisy in giving and in praying, and especially in relation to praying, He proceeded to tell them how they should pray. He said, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us*

*this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*" Most people who claim to believe in Christ call this the Lord's prayer. Then they go on to do the very thing Jesus condemned in the verses preceding this prayer; that is, they repeat it publicly and thereby call special attention to themselves, appearing to seek the praise and glory of men. This may not always be the motive behind their actions, but it often appears that way to those who are looking on and listening to it. When a group of people quote it each time they meet, it also becomes vain repetition, another practice Christ condemned in prayers.

Before going further, let me say that the foregoing prayer is not the Lord's prayer. Even if it was, the Lord has not authorized us to use it in the way most believers use it today; that is, by congregations publicly quoting it in unison every time they meet or just prior to their dismissal from their worship services. Now I know that, reading this, some of you may immediately jump to the conclusion that I don't believe the word of God, that I don't believe in the Lord's prayer, etc. I do believe in the word of God and I do believe in the prayers that Jesus uttered, but this particular prayer is not the Lord's prayer, at all. To so label it is to misrepresent Christ. If you would like to read one of the Lord's prayers, then turn to John 17. How about quoting that each time you meet?

Why is this prayer not the Lord's prayer? For the simple reason that the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, and then He told them that they should pray "in this manner". He did not necessarily mean that they should make that their prayer, and



certainly not that they should memorize it and say the same prayer every time. But, He suggested that this was a model prayer or a prayer of example.

In this prayer He taught the disciples to direct their thoughts to their Father in heaven, that they should glorify His name, and that they should pray for the coming of the kingdom, the church. The church had not yet come at that time, but promised (Matthew 16:18,19), and did come (Acts 2). The Hebrew writer later confirmed this (Hebrews 12:28). The disciples could pray for the coming of the kingdom at that time, but we cannot pray that prayer at this time. Why? Because the kingdom has long since come. We should pray for the growth of the kingdom, but not for its coming. A young man might pray for a good wife, but once he has married, he surely wouldn't continue to pray for a wife. I think you can see the point.

Christ then proceeded to encourage them to pray that the Lord's will be done, to thank God for their daily bread, and to ask for the forgiveness of their sins as they were willing to forgive those who sinned against them. Finally, He told them to ask that they be delivered from temptation and evil, and to close the prayer in recognizing God's dominion, His power, and that all glory belongs to Him.

Also, Christ did not ask the disciples to pray to God in His name on this occasion, since He was still with them, and had not yet died on the cross to provide remission of sins and to serve as their advocate. Yet today, we are to pray to our Father in the name of Christ (1 John 2:1). This is another reason why we could not use this prayer, word for word, as many do today, because in doing so we would not be praying in the name of Christ.

Many things could be said on behalf of prayer — the importance of prayer — but the thing that I want you to remember from this study is that, when we pray, we must be God's children in order for Him to be our Father, and that we must pray in all honesty and sincerity, according to the will of the Father, if our prayers are to be heard and answered (1 John 5:14).

Are you a child of God? Are you a Christian? If not, then you are not even in position to pray. What a terrible state to be in! But here is good news: you can become a child of God, you can be a member of the family of God, the church. And here is the way you can do it: if you will believe in God, and Christ as the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess Christ before men as being God's Son, and if you will be baptized, buried in water, then the Lord will save you and add you to His church. Read Mark 16:15,16 and Acts 2 and you will find that this is what is required of one who wants to obey God. It is my prayer that you will do this.

## Lesson 6

# Lay Not Treasures Upon The Earth

Jesus said, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21).

Man has a tendency to lay up and to horde material things. We are reminded of the rich man in Luke 12:16-21: *"The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? So he said, I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

In Matthew 19:16-22 we read of a young man coming to Jesus, wanting to know what he should do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments and he said that he had done that. Then Jesus said unto him, *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*

The types of treasures that man collects generally consist of money, jewelry, houses, land, and other things that he can handle and control. Jesus tells us, however, that we should not lay up treasures like this. These are not true riches, things that will last. Instead they are things that moth and rust can destroy, that thieves can break through and steal. Even if one is able to keep them all his life, he cannot take them with him when he dies. But such things can easily become a person's master and god. They are, therefore, dangerous and can easily cause one to be lost.

Money and wealth are so deceitful. While they can do some things, there are many things they cannot do. They cannot buy health, raise the dead, assure one of success, or bring one happiness. Usually, the most miserable people in the world are those who have great riches.

Often times those who are poor look at those with wealth and think how happy they would be if only they were rich. But they are not aware of all of the heartache and problems that go along with those riches. They are not aware of all the responsibilities that one has when he is wealthy. He must somehow hold on to his money and other forms of wealth. He often times does not have many friends, because he is suspicious that those around him are trying to get to his money. He is afraid that someone will rob him, cheat him, etc.

The word of God warns us that riches can destroy. Paul advised, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of*

*all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*" (1 Timothy 6:6-10).

The rich man, or even the poor man who is constantly thinking about material things and how to get them, usually has little time for spiritual things. Jesus said, *"Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"* (Matthew 19:23,24). One who is rich, or who is materially minded, is hard to reach. Of course if that person will turn to God, have a change of mind toward material things, then it is possible for him to be saved and to go to heaven because he ceases to trust in his material riches and turns his attention instead to the riches in Christ.

Jesus asks us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. It is not wrong to have earthly treasures, or riches. However, our priority in life should be the storing of spiritual riches. These are things that will last for all time and eternity. If one's riches are in heaven, then moth and rust cannot corrupt them and neither can thieves break through to steal. These are true riches.

In Matthew 6, Jesus discussed the more important things of life. He says, *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing?"*

*"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."* (Matthew 6:25-34).

In the foregoing verses, Jesus is saying that we should not rely on and put our trust in the material things of this world. We should not even worry over them and be all that concerned about our physical needs. He says that the Father provides for the fowl of the air, cares for the lily of the field, and clothes the grass of the field. If He would do that, surely He would care for His own and provide for their needs. He says that if we will only put God and His kingdom first in our lives, then our other needs will be supplied. Do we believe this? We should, because the Lord Himself has promised this.

All human beings are blessed by their Maker. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. The earth yields its fruit to all. We have the sun, wind, rain, air, water, and so many other things that God gives His creatures. But the Christian not only has those things; he also has the spiritual blessings. It is a mistake to think only of the material things of this world and overlook the true spiritual riches. These include God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the

Bible or the word of God, salvation, the grace and mercy of God, the soul, the church, prayer, forgiveness, love, worship, the fellowship of other Christians, friends, loved ones, hope, etc. One could have all the money in the world, be the head of a great country, and have the world itself, but if he didn't have these blessings — the true riches of God — he would have nothing. Again, one may have no money, no property, and be without a thousand other things, but if his soul is saved, and he has the hope of eternal life, then he is a rich man.

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Finally, Christ said that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. In other words, if your treasures are the material things of this world, then your mind, thoughts, and very soul will be wrapped up in those things. It is obvious to all, since your emphasis will be upon those things. But if you are more concerned about God, obeying His will, living for Him, serving Him, and preparing your soul for the hereafter, then your heart will rest in those things. You'll talk about spiritual matters. Your spiritual emphasis will be seen in every phase of your life. As the Lord said, by their fruits you shall know them.

How may one have the true riches of God? To possess them, you must obey and follow Jesus. You must be a Christian and a member of Christ's church. Without the Lord and salvation you are as a beggar; you are poor, wretched, and hopeless.

You can put off the old man of sin and the woes of this world and put on the new man, Christ Jesus, and thus lay hold on the riches of God by believing God and believing in Christ, His Son, repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and being baptized to wash away your sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3,4). In response to your trusting obedience, the Lord will save you, add you to His church, make you a Christian, and give you all the blessings that He has in store for those who obey Him and remain faithful to Him (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 1:3). Try Him and see for yourself.



## Lesson 7

# No Man Can Serve Two Masters

Jesus said, *"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matthew 6:24).

In this statement Jesus sets forth an eternal principle: no man can serve or be loyal to two masters. One might try to serve two, but in the end he will be faithful to one while rejecting the other. It, therefore, behooves you and me to decide who our master will be and then to faithfully serve him.

There are several things that we want to observe just here:

1. There are two great masters in the world today. One is the savior and the other is the destroyer. One is Christ and the other is Satan. Christ is great because He is Deity. Satan is great in the sense of having a large following.

2. Man is in the unique position of being able to choose whom he will serve. Even in the long ago, God's servant, Joshua, put this choice before Israel when he said, *"Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land*

*you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD"* (Joshua 24:14,15). The choice is still there for us. Christ does not force Himself on anyone. He merely invites us to come, and then it is up to you and me to decide what we will do. Hear Him as He says, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

3. You will have to choose one master or the other. You cannot be neutral about it, and you cannot choose both. To refuse to choose is actually to choose Satan. He is more than willing to welcome you into his fold. In the case of Christ, He requires a more definite commitment.

4. Whoever you choose, him you will serve. If you reject the one you are presently serving in favor of the other, then you will become the servant of a new master. That means that you will obey him, do the things he wants you to do, give your life to him, worship him, and remain faithful to him.

5. Because it is possible to switch from one master to the other, there is room for hope for those who are following Satan. On the other hand, it is the worst of tragedies when a disciple of Christ denies Him or becomes indifferent and falls away, only to end up on Satan's side.

6. Each master has something to offer. Christ offers salvation and hope. Satan promises pleasure and worldly delights in this life only, but his promises are lies.

7. There is a price to pay regardless of the master you serve. If you follow Christ, He expects you to repent of your sins, to

abstain from the very appearance of evil, and to live a righteous life. If you follow Satan you will have to suffer the consequences of your sinful and worldly life.

Now let us take a look at the two masters between which we have to choose. We'll begin with the one who has the largest following in the world today, and of course that is Satan himself.

In the scriptures Satan is known as the devil, the adversary (1 Peter 5:8), Beelzebub (Mark 3:22), the tempter (Matthew 4:3), the wicked one (1 John 2:14), the deceiver of the world (Revelation 12:9), the father of lies (John 8:44), the prince of the world (John 14:30), and the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Satan is always associated with the bad, the wrong, the ungodly, the wicked, the evil, the worldly things of this life, the works of the flesh, and sin. He deceives, misleads, lies, murders, and destroys. There is no good about him. He opposes God the Father and Christ the Son. He seeks to lead and destroy every soul he possibly can. Because of his cunningness and craftiness, and his appeal to the flesh, he is able to dominate and control most people around the world. To those who are interested in religion, he offers the religions of the world. He tells those who want to follow Christ that it doesn't matter what name they wear, that one church is as good as the other, that there are many ways to heaven.

Satan constantly tempts people through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. John wrote, *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"* (1 John 2:16). Concerning the lust of the flesh, Peter said, *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"* (1 Peter 2:11). Paul

said, *"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts"* (Romans 13:14). In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul declared, *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."*

Next, there is the lust of the eye. The wise man, Solomon, said, *"Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied"* (Proverbs 27:20). And then there is the vain glory of life or the pride of life. James wrote, *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you"* (James 4:6,7). After discussing the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, John said, *"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"* (1 John 2:17).

Now, do you think that you want Satan to be your master? In all probability, he already is your master. The question is, do you want him to continue to be your master? If not, what is your alternative?

In opposition to Satan, there is Christ. He is from God. He is the Son of God. He died on the cross for the sins of the world. He is the Savior of man. He built the church — His family — and is its head. He represents all that is good and right in this world; He opposes all that is bad and wrong. He is the chief opponent of Satan and the only one who is able to defeat him. The Apostle John reminds us, *"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of*

*God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:8,9). The Hebrew writer said, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14,15).*

Of course, those who live a worldly, ungodly, and sinful life, indulging in the works of the flesh, without question accept Satan as their master. But actually, to be a follower of Satan, *all you have to do is absolutely nothing*. To reject Christ means that by default you accept Satan as your master. To refuse to obey Christ's teaching and be a part of His church means that you oppose Christ and side with the devil and his workers. If you become a Christian and then later become indifferent and unfaithful, in reality you become an ally of the Lord's arch-rival, Satan himself.

Who is your master? Whose side are you on? Who do you serve? This is something you cannot be indifferent about. If you don't want to serve Satan — and surely you would not, since he will offer you nothing in return but heartache and eternal destruction — then I would hope that you might be persuaded to accept Christ as your Lord and Master. He has everything to offer. He can take you out of sin, save you, bless you with a good life in this world, and give you the hope of eternal life. But He can do this only if you make up your mind that you will trust in Him and obey His teachings. This is very simple. If you will believe in God, and Christ as His Son, if you will repent of your sins, if you

will confess Christ as the Son of God, if you will be baptized for the remission of your sins, He will save you and add you to His church (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38;47). Then as a Christian, as His follower, as a member of His family, the church, He asks that you be faithful to Him. This includes worshipping Him each first day of the week, working for His cause, and living a godly life. In turn He will be with you, help you, serve as your advocate with God, make it possible to be associated with the best people in the world, enable you to help others, give you happiness, help you influence the world for better, etc. Actually, there is no way to begin to tell you of all the blessings the Lord has in store for those who will serve Him. It's a great life, believe me!

## Lesson 8

# “Judge Not”

Jesus said, *“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, Let me remove the speck from your eye; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (Matthew 7:1-5).

If you are familiar with this passage of scripture, you are probably aware of the fact that it is widely used to condemn judging. For instance, if I should find any fault whatsoever with someone, especially in a religious sense, then he might well remind me of the fact that Jesus said that we should not judge. Those who would so use that statement, however, are misapplying it in most cases. Jesus was not saying that we should not judge under normal circumstances, but that we should not judge or condemn a person for doing something wrong, when in fact we are doing the same thing or perhaps something even worse ourselves! He was saying that we should not condemn a person for doing what we are doing, lest we, in condemning him, condemn ourselves. For instance, if I am a thief and I condemn a friend of mine for being a thief, in condemning him, I am also condemning myself. If he is to be condemned for such a sin, then since I am doing the same thing, I should likewise be condemned. If it is wrong for one, then it is wrong for the other. The same would

apply for any sin. Jesus was, therefore, saying that if you don't want to be condemned for a particular sin, then you had better not condemn another person for that same sin. Of course sin is sin and it is wrong and needs to be condemned regardless of who is doing it, but the one who is guilty of a particular sin is really not in a position to try to correct others for engaging in the same sin.

Jesus illustrated His point by asking why one should behold a speck in his brother's eye when he had a plank in his own eye. In other words, why should one be concerned about getting a little sin out of his brother's life, when he had something much worse in his own life? How would he even be able to see clearly enough to get something out of his brother's eye in that case? Jesus said, then, that a person who would do such a thing is a hypocrite. He is pretending that there is no sin in his life while trying to remove the relatively small wrong in his brother. Again, Jesus said that if that person really wants to help his brother, he should first of all cast out the plank or sin in his own life, and then he will be in position to see clearly enough to cast out the speck or minor wrong in his brother's life.

The whole lesson here is that one cannot help his fellowman until he first of all cleans up his own life. Once he has obeyed God and is trying to live the faithful Christian life, he is in a better position to try to help others. Let me illustrate. One cannot effectively encourage someone to believe in God unless he believes in God himself. He cannot encourage one to obey the gospel unless he has done the same. One cannot preach the importance of the church unless he is a member of it. And neither can one encourage a member of the church to be faithful to the Lord unless he is a faithful member.

The word judge means to "form an authoritative opinion, to



try, to determine or pronounce after inquiry and deliberation, to form an estimate, conclusion, or evaluation about something. To condemn, decree, determine, and sentence.” That is, it means to pass judgment, to find fault, to condemn, at least in the sense that we are using it here.

Someone may make the point that it is God and God only who has the power or the authority to judge. The Hebrew writer says, *“To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to spirits of just men made perfect”* (Hebrews 12:23). Again, the same writer says, *“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge”* (Hebrews 13:4). God is the final judge, and when a person dies, he is in God’s hands. In that case it is not appropriate for me, or anyone else, to pass judgment on the deceased by saying that he has gone to heaven or to hell. We are not in a position to make final judgment. Only God can do that.

Also, we are told that God will judge the world through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul preached, *“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30,31). Although Christ is not mentioned by name here, still He is identified as being the one whom God has raised from the dead, thus giving assurance to all men through Him, the one whom God had appointed. This can be no one but Christ, and it is through Christ that God will judge all the world on the day He will appoint. Again, Paul said, *“In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ accord-*

ing to my gospel" (Romans 2:16). We are told that we will also be judged by the word. Christ said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The Apostle John wrote, "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

And finally, as the Lord explained to Peter and the disciples the rewards they would receive for following Him, He said, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28).

We are told that there will be a final day of judgment which God Himself will appoint (Hebrews 9:27). On that great day God will judge all mankind, that is, through His Son, Jesus Christ, and His word. The apostles will also participate in this judgment, since they were inspired of God to pen the New Testament, the law by which man will be judged.

But what about the Christian today? Does he have the right to judge those around him? All of us judge one another in various ways. We may do so by word of mouth, that is, by pointing out some fault or wrong. We may also do so by simply not participating with a person in some wrong doing. For example, a person who takes strong drink wants his friend to drink with him. If the friend refuses, he takes offense in this, feeling that the refusal is a condemnation for his drinking. The same is true with all people who do evil and unlawful things. They want their

associates to participate with them so that neither will be able to condemn the other.

As Christians, when we point out that something is wrong morally or spiritually, we do not do so on the basis of our own authority, but because the word of God has spoken on the matter. If I make a statement or judgment based solely on my own opinion, it has no weight, no authority behind it, it means nothing, and it is only our thinking against someone else's. But if the word of God says something, and we base what we say on it, provided we have the proper attitude, then we have a perfect right to speak up. Actually, it is not we who are judging in such a case, but the word of God. We are only pointing out what God has already said.

What most people ignore in this passage on judgment is that Christ's prohibition is based on hypocrisy and sin in one's own life. What was His conclusion? Not to judge righteous judgment? No. He said, first, clean up your own life and then you will be able to see clearly to help clean up the lives of others. Jesus' conclusion (to judge righteously, with clear vision) is totally different from those who would say don't judge at all.

When we point out that one must believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16), that one must be buried in water to be baptized (Romans 6:3,4; Acts 8:38), that the Lord has one church and that He adds the saved to it (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47), we are not making these exclusionary statements and judging by our own authority, but we are merely pointing out what the Bible teaches. When we condemn sin, denominationalism, man-made teachings, the idea that there are many ways to heaven, that one name is as good as another, and many other false doctrines, again, we are doing so on the authority of the scriptures. You or others may tell us that we are judging, that we have no right to judge,

but that does not take away from the fact that the word of God has judged already and that we will have to face it in the day of judgment. We cannot do away with such truths by condemning the one who is calling them to our attention, or by using the old argument that we are forbidden to judge.

If you will read through the word of God you will find that Christ condemned sin, hypocrisy, false prophets, false teachers, and false doctrines. The apostles did the same. We, likewise, must preach the word, and, in doing so, we must not only point out what the Lord wants us to do but also what He doesn't want us to do. We must also condemn sin, wrong doing, false teachers, and religious error. This is not something that is pleasant to do, but it must be done. Man must be taught the truth, warned of error, and encouraged to follow Christ lest he be deceived and end up lost. But if he will listen and obey God, he can be saved.

Christ says that if we are hypocrites we need to correct our own lives before we begin to try to help others. If we have obeyed God, and we are doing the best we can to be faithful to Him, then we have a perfect right, and responsibility, to try to help others. If we fail to do so, we will be held accountable.

## Lesson 9

# The Golden Rule

Jesus said, *“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12). Luke recorded this verse like this: *“And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise”* (Luke 6:31). As we continue to read, Christ illustrates His point, *“But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High”* (Luke 6:32-36).

Another way of saying Jesus’ words is, “Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you.” This is often called the golden rule. It is an eternal principle that is as modern and up-to-date today as it was when Jesus gave it. As a matter of fact, Christ said that this rule represented the teaching of the law and the prophets. The same principle or teaching is also what Christianity is all about.

Most people in the world do not think of others. They are selfish, thinking only of themselves. To get their way and to have what they want, they don’t mind taking advantage of the other person, even hurting him. This is why we have robberies and killing and numerous other crimes throughout the world.

The Christian does not seek revenge. Paul said, *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:14-21).

Again, Paul said, *"Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you"* (Ephesians 4:25-31).

Listen again to Paul, *"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and*

*arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself. Now godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:3-6).*

Christ said, *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11,12).*

The Christian does not limit his love only to those who love him. He does love such people, but his love, kindness, and good works goes beyond that. Jesus taught, *“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).* In the same vein, Paul said, *“...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:13,14).*

All of the foregoing scriptures, and many others that we could add, suggest that the Christian does not think only of him-

self. He thinks of his fellowman, his neighbor, those who are kind to him, and those who are unkind as well. He tries to have a good relationship with all. He even goes beyond the call of duty to try to do a little extra, to go the "second mile".

Think about Christ. He came into this world to live among men and to die on the cross for sinful man. He didn't have to do that, but He did. Peter wrote, *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed"* (1 Peter 2:21-24). Why was Christ willing to give Himself for sinners? Why was God willing to allow His Son to come to die on the cross? All of this was because of love of mankind (John 3:15,17; Romans 5:8). God put the welfare of the souls of men first, even to His own cost. That is real love!

As God's people, we are to love God and our fellowman. We must put their interests and welfare above our own. When we do so, we let them know that our love is real, that it is genuine.

To be more specific, let us ask some questions: how would we want to be treated by our fellow man? Would we want to be cursed? Would we want to be hurt by him? Would we want him to lie to us? Would we want him to be dishonest with us? Would we want him to withhold the truth from us? Would we want him to deceive us religiously? No, we would not want him to do any of these things to us. If that be so, then we in turn should not treat him that way, and neither will we, if we are Christians.



Again, considering the fact that we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, we must use that principle as a gauge in all we say and do. Because of this truth, we should always want to tell the truth, preach the one pure gospel of Christ, tell all mankind about the one true church of the Lord, that Christ is the Saviour of it, and that it wears His name. We should always want to condemn sin, to condemn division and plead for unity in Christ, to encourage the kind of worship set forth in the scripture, to preach that there is one way to heaven and there is a real heaven and a real hell. We should always want to preach and teach these truths, and the many others that involve the soul, because that is how we would want others to deal with us. We certainly wouldn't want our friends to be so kind and polite with us that they would fail to share the truth if they understood it and we did not.

I would like to ask you about the kind of life you are living. Do you practice the golden rule, of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you? Do you believe in it? Just imagine what it could do to your life if you would practice it. Just think of what it would do for mankind if people in general practiced that principle all over the world.

## Lesson 10

# The Broad and Narrow Ways

Jesus said, *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”* (Matthew 7:13,14).

In these verses Jesus tells us that as we go through life there are two roads on which one may travel. One is broad and the other is narrow. Many are on the broad way, and only a few are on the narrow way. The broad way leads to hell and the narrow leads to heaven.

It should be pointed out that all people must travel on one of these ways. That includes you and me. We cannot be indifferent and reason that we are not interested in either, so we will travel on neither of the ways. To reject one means that we accept the other. Neither can we travel on both of the ways at the same time. It is possible, though, to finally reach the point of realizing that you are traveling on the wrong road, and therefore you may take steps to move to the other road. If you are on the narrow way and you become indifferent and careless, becoming unfaithful to Christ, you will find yourself on the broad way again!

We are not forced to travel on the broad way or the narrow way, but rather, we are given a choice as to which road we will travel. Satan would encourage and invite you to take the broad

way that leads to destruction, while Christ would urge you to follow Him on the narrow way, which leads to God and heaven itself. But the decision is yours to make.

When a person reaches the age of knowing right from wrong — the age of accountability — he comes to that point in his life where he must choose which road he will take. Will it be the broad way or the narrow way? Perhaps you are at that point now, or maybe you have long since passed that time in your life and therefore you find yourself on the broad way by default since you did not choose Christ. Maybe you were not aware of Christ and the narrow way — not aware that you had a choice. In that case, let us discuss the broad and narrow ways so that you might know more about them, enabling you to make an intelligent decision concerning them.

First, let us consider the broad way. Christ says that it has a wide gate, that is, there are no constraints or restriction: every one is allowed through this gate and into this broad way. When one chooses this wide gate, he finds himself upon a broad way, traveling along with the vast majority of the people of the world. But there is something else that we must keep in mind about this way. Christ says that it leads to destruction. It may be that you like being on the side of the majority. But do you want to be with the majority when they are all headed for destruction? Being with the majority in this case is a tragedy.

But let's take a closer look at this road. Let's see what it represents and the kinds of people who travel on it. If it leads to destruction, then it is Satan's way or the devil's way. Peter describes him as our adversary and as a roaring lion. He says, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*" (1 Peter

5:8). Since the broad way represents Satan, a way that leads to destruction, it represents all that is evil, and ungodly. People of the world are traveling on this way. Because of their sinful and ungodly living they cannot be a part of the Lord's kingdom, and therefore they are lost. Paul says, "*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 6:9,10). If these people cannot inherit or become a part of the Lord's kingdom, the church, where are they? They are traveling the broad way that leads to destruction.

The Apostle Paul goes on to talk about the works of the flesh. Listen to him: "*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:19-21). According to Paul, those who do the works of the flesh cannot enter the kingdom of God or the church. Why? Because their deeds are wicked and sinful. Then on what road would such people be traveling? On the broad way, since the wages of sin brings death or destruction, according to Romans 6:23.

Do you want to be a part of such a group? Do you want to keep company with them and share their reward of eternal destruction?

But the evil are not the only ones on the broad way. There are a lot of good people traveling that road, too. That is, they are

living good moral lives but they still have not obeyed God. There are even a lot of religious people traveling on the broad way. Christ said, *"Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Matthew 7:21-23).

Since there are religious people on the broad way, I must tell you that there are even unfaithful Christians who are traveling that way. These are the ones who are said to be hypocrites, or they have slipped away from God and have gone back into the world and sin. At any rate, they are lost and are on the way to destruction.

Would you like to travel on this road and be associated with the devil, the wicked, the immoral, those in religious error, unfaithful Christians, etc. and to know that your final destination will be destruction? If you don't want to be a part of all that, then you must take steps to change to the other road, the narrow way, the road that leads to heaven. It is up to you.

Let us briefly take a look at the narrow road to see what kind of way it is, and the kind of people who are traveling on it. First of all, it has a strait gate. The word "strait" here means narrow, strict and difficult. You have to look for it and you have to put forth effort to enter. Unlike the wide gate and broad way that requires no real effort to enter and to travel, only a few restrict themselves to the narrowness of truth. It is the singleness of truth that defines the "strait" gate, in contrast to the millions of forms error and lies can take in reference to the broad way. The "strait"

gate requires total surrender to Christ and faithfulness in traveling to the end of the road to receive the reward of eternal life.

This narrow way is the way of Christ. He is there, leading those who follow Him. Christ said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). There are not many ways, but one way, and that is through Christ. He invites us to come to Him. Hear Him, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30).

Those who will accept the Lord's invitation by obeying His gospel, that is, by believing in Him, repenting of their sins, confessing Him as the Son of God, and being baptized, Jesus saves and adds to His church (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:47). Through their faith and obedience, they enter the strait gate and are able to travel on the narrow way. That means that Christians, godly people, the righteous, those who have been washed in the Lamb's blood and whose lives are all that is good and right, are on the narrow way that leads to heaven. Christ said, *"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10). Again, we read, *"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city"* (Revelation 22:14). James tells us, *"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him"* (James 1:12).

Are you on the narrow way? If so, you have obeyed Christ, you are following Christ, you are a Christian, you are saved, you are a member of the Lord's church. If you will remain faithful to the end, then this narrow way will lead you to heaven. If you are not on this narrow way, you are on the broad way where Satan is Lord and where the wicked, the deceived, the hypocrites walk. This way leads to destruction. Wouldn't you prefer to be on the narrow way? You can change from the broad way to the narrow way if you will turn to Christ, who can save you. Through your faith and obedience, you will enter the strait gate and travel on the narrow way where Christ and His people are, and where all spiritual blessings exist. This will lead you to the New Jerusalem, the eternal city of God, heaven itself.

## Beware of False Prophets

Jesus said, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them”* (Matthew 7:15-20).

First of all, I want you to note that Jesus warned His disciples concerning false prophets or false teachers. They did exist, even then. Just because someone was a religious teacher did not mean that he always taught the truth of God.

The threat of false teachers was so great that Jesus warned again and again against them. On another occasion He said, *“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many”* (Matthew 24:11). Again He said, *“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect”* (Matthew 24:24). Peter said, *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed”* (2 Peter 2:1,2).

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church, and said to them, *“Therefore take heed to yourselves*



*and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:28-30). The Apostle John warned, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).*

Now, what are all of these warnings by Christ and the apostles about? They are about false prophets and teachers. They are false; that is, they are not true and genuine teachers of God. They are also preaching and teaching that which is false, that which is error. They may be doing this for some selfish or material motive, but still they are doing it. In some cases they may be deceived themselves, and, therefore, they are sincerely teaching that which is contrary to God's will. But whether deceived or doing it for some other reason, their work results in souls being deceived, led away from God, and eternally lost. This is why Christ and the apostles warned the people of their day against such prophets and teachers.

False teachers and preachers, however, are not peculiar only to the first century. There are worlds of them today to be found everywhere. They are so strong that many think of their teaching as being the truth and that which the Bible teaches to be false. In other words, they have completely turned things around, and the person who doesn't think for himself and doesn't study the Bible or investigate by comparing that which he hears with the word of God, will be easily deceived.

The thing we need to keep in mind is that Jesus and the apos-

bles warned against such preachers and teachers. Through the word of God, they are asking us to be on the alert, saying that we should not be deceived, that we should obey only the teaching of the word of God if we are to be saved. When people ignore such warnings and accept many things that are not found in the scriptures, they are very hard to help. If one is determined to be deceived, to commit spiritual suicide, then what can you do?

Jesus said that there would be those in His day claiming to be the Christ. There are still people in the world who claim that they are the Messiah, that they have come to save mankind. There are preachers who say that they can perform miracles. Many others teach that there are many churches, that baptism is sprinkling, that there are many ways to heaven, that there is nothing in a name. These are things that the Bible clearly condemns. Even though they are the opposite of what the scriptures say, people go on believing them and teaching them. It is simply amazing. It seems that the more wild a person is in his teaching, the more attention he gets and the bigger following he is able to maintain. How sad!

The Apostle John said that we should not believe every spirit or every preacher because many such false teachers have gone out into the world. He commanded, therefore, that we try them or test them. How can we do that? By hearing the things that they have to say and then comparing them with the word of God. If what they teach conflicts with the scripture, we will know that they are false teachers. Isn't that simple? My friends, it doesn't matter who people are, how many degrees they may have, what position they may hold, how much wealth they may have. If they are teaching things contrary to the doctrine of Jesus, then they are false. If you listen to them and carry out their instructions, you

also will be lost. Man cannot save man, regardless of what he says or what he promises. It doesn't matter how good he may be, how pious he may be, still, if he opposes God's way, then we must oppose him.

In Matthew 7:15-20 Jesus said that these false teachers would come in sheep's clothing. That is, they would come disguised or pretending to represent the Lord. Christ, here, is thinking about a flock of sheep, and, in His day, there were always wolves trying to get to the flock. Jesus is saying that a false teacher is like a wolf that is trying to slip up on the sheep, posing or pretending to be one of the sheep. He tries to gain the respect of the Lord's people so that he can preach his false doctrine. Christ is, therefore, warning us against such a teacher, telling us that he is nothing but a wolf. If we are not on guard the wolf will deceive us and destroy us.

Christ also says that we may know a false prophet or teacher by the type of fruit he bears. He asks if men gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. Of course, to ask such questions is to answer them. All know that grapes do not come from thorns or figs from thistles. The point that He is making is that neither does any good thing come from false teaching. But to further impress this lesson upon His audience, He continues to illustrate. He points out that only a good tree brings forth good fruit, but, at the same time, it is the corrupt tree that brings forth bad fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth bad fruit and neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Then what do you do with such trees? Naturally, the good tree is kept for its good fruit but the corrupt tree is cut down and cast into the fire. So if nothing else works, at least you can tell the type of tree that you have by the fruit that it bears.

The lesson Jesus is presenting here is very simple. The teacher of God is going to teach the truth, and his fruit will be good. The false teacher will teach that which is contrary to God's will, and his fruit will be bad. You can look at the religious world today and see that what the Lord said still holds true. Those who preach the truth, that which is in harmony with the word of God, are bearing good fruit. That fruit is pure New Testament Christianity, exalting the name of Christ, setting forth the one true church, unity, love, good works, etc. False teaching produces different religions, different faiths, man-made churches or denominations, numerous names, opposing ways of worship, and all kinds of doctrines and practices. As a result, the religious world is divided. One opposes the other; there is envy, strife, fighting, etc. As Jesus said, "*Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them.*"

Let me encourage you not to be deceived in matters of religion. Don't allow a false teacher to lead you off after himself and the things that he teaches. Rather, go to the Bible, the word of God, and read it, study it and do what it says. If you will, you will be right and you will bear good fruit.

## Not All Who Call on the Lord's Name Will Be Saved

Jesus said, "*Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*" (Matthew 7:21-23).

For some reason the majority of those who believe in Christ have the impression that all they have to do to be saved is to call on the name of the Lord and He will hear them and save them. They refer to such verses of scripture as Acts 2:21 and Romans 10:13 where it says that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Likewise in Acts 22:16 we read where Saul was told, "*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*"

In all three cases, one actually needs to take a look at the context and then he must harmonize these statements with other passages of scripture that deal with the subject of salvation. When one does that, it becomes plain that "*calling on the name of the Lord*" means more than calling on the Lord through prayer. Actually, we are told, "*Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him*" (John 9:31). But if "*calling on the name of the Lord*" doesn't have reference to prayer, then what does it mean? It

means that through one's obedience, one is asking the Lord to honor His promise to forgive him of his sins. This is clearly what Christ is saying in Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*"

The Lord requires obedience. He said, "*But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46). One can call on the Lord again and again through prayer, but what good does it do if that person refuses to do what the Lord requires? To do what Christ has asked one to do is the real test of faith, of love for the Lord, of desire to be saved.

Jesus said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). He also said, "*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you*" (John 15:14). James said, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves*" (James 1:22). Finally, we read, "*Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city*" (Revelation 22:14).

From the foregoing statements we would have to conclude that the Lord wants us to obey Him if we expect to be saved. As you go through the conversions in the book of Acts, you will observe that in every case where souls were saved, their salvation was preceded by hearing the gospel, believing it, repenting of their sins, and being baptized for the remission of sins. Christ had already commanded the apostles, "*And He said to them, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:15,16).

When one obeys the gospel of Christ, and is saved, the Lord

adds that person to the kingdom of heaven, which is the church. This is the Lord's church, the church of Christ. Paul says that one enters Christ and the church through the act of baptism (Romans 6:3,4; 1 Corinthians 12:13). There is no other way to enter.

Now, there are many people today who say that salvation is by faith only, or solely by the grace of God. We must have faith to obey God, and that faith leads us to repentance, to the confession that Christ is the Son of God, and baptism for the remission of sins. Then, one must remain faithful. But, "faith only" does not and will not save anyone (James 2).

In Matthew 7:21, the Lord is picturing the judgment of God in the last day. He depicts various ones on that day debating Him concerning their acceptance or their salvation. He says that many will say, "*Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?*" This argument is being made after the Lord had pointed out that in order for one to be saved he must be a doer of the word. So here are people explaining that they have prophesied in His name or that they have taught in His name, and, therefore, they feel that they should be eternally saved. As important as teaching is, teaching "only" is not enough to save, especially when he is teaching error. For teaching to be worthwhile; first of all it is necessary that one be a doer of the word himself, that is, that one be a Christian, and a member of the Lord's family, the church. In the next place, it is necessary that one teach the truth.

There are many things taught today, supposedly in the name of Christ. Most of what is taught is false. Christ did not authorize these divisive doctrines, they cannot save the one who teaches them, and they cannot save the hearers. To the contrary, such man-made doctrines and opinions will cause those who accept them to be lost, along with the ones who teach them.

The Apostle Paul wrote concerning false teachers, *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Romans 16:17,18). Again, he exhorted the Corinthians, *"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Corinthians 1:10).

To the Galatian brethren, Paul wrote, *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:6-9).

Finally, we read concerning the Lord's word, *"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book"* (Revelation 22:18,19).

From these various passages of scripture we can see the importance of preaching and teaching only the word of God. But we can also see the great responsibility one has in proclaiming it



just as it is. If one fails to teach the pure truth, he will have to answer to Christ and His word on that great day (John 12:48).

Again, the Lord says that many will say on the day of judgment that they have *cast out devils in His name*. We know that at this time, for instance, there are thousands of people around the world who claim to be able to cast out devils and do other types of miracles as well. They evidently think that since they claim to be able to do these things, this should assure them a home in heaven. In the first place, though, there are no people in the world today who are able to cast out the devil in the Lord's name or anyone else's name. Miracles have ceased. Of course, in the days of Christ, He and the apostles, and the ones on whom they laid their hands were able to perform miracles, but when they died, the miraculous age ceased. The word of God has been given to us in written form, it has been confirmed, and now faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). So even in Christ's day, just because someone claimed to be able to cast out devils, didn't mean that he was a child of God. Neither do such claims today prove that the speaker is of God and accepted by Him. On the contrary, according to Christ's words, it proves just the opposite.

Finally, Christ said that there would be those at the day of judgment claiming that they should be accepted because they had done *many wonderful works in His name*. Again, then and now, there have been many who have spent their lives doing good works, but regardless of the good works one might do, they mean nothing apart from obedience.

Christ said concerning these people that He will profess unto them that He never knew them. Then He will command that they depart from Him since they are workers of iniquity. Won't that

be a sad day for masses of people? When Christ said that He would tell them that He never knew them, it means that they never did belong to Him. There are worlds of people today who think they belong to Christ, but they do not. They have never obeyed Him, have never been added to His church or become members of His family. They do not wear the Lord's name, they do not worship Him as the scriptures teach, and so they will have to be told one day by the Lord Himself that they do not belong to Him. Isn't that sad? Here are people who have spent their whole lives in what they thought was service to the Lord and then they will have to be rejected. Why? Because they never did obey the Lord. They were deceived; therefore He will have to reject them, turn them away, cast them out, send them to their eternal doom, because they were workers of iniquity. That is, they had done that which was evil in following the teachings of men, placing their trust in their own way, their own works, etc.

My friends, do not be deceived into thinking that you can be saved and go to heaven separate and apart from obeying the will of the Lord. Don't put your trust in yourself or in any man. Rather, come to God's word, read and study it, believe it, and obey it so that you might be saved in this world and in the world to come. There is one way and that way is the Lord's.

## Lesson 13

# The Two Builders

Jesus said, *"I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall"* (Matthew 7:24-27).

In this passage of scripture Jesus makes some simple statements about two builders and draws from them some powerful lessons for us all.

Christ commanded the apostles to take the gospel into all the world and preach it to every creature so that all mankind might hear His word and know His will (Mark 16:15,16). The gospel is still to be taken to all people everywhere so that each soul might have the opportunity to know the truth of God, and, therefore, to be in a position to choose whether he will accept it or reject it.

Please notice in the story of the two builders that each one heard the sayings of Christ, and each one was in a position to obey the Lord. But one did and the other didn't. Therefore, one was wise and the other was foolish. This was based on the fact that one obeyed the teaching of Christ. He was like the man who wisely built on the rock, and because of it, his house stood against all of the elements of nature. The other man did not obey the

teaching of Christ. He was like the man who built his house upon the sand, and it fell because it could not withstand the elements of nature. The conclusion, then, is that the man who hears the sayings of Christ, and does them, is a wise man. But the one who hears the words of life, and does not obey them, is a foolish man.

Now let's consider each man again and what he did or didn't do and the results that followed. Jesus said, "*But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine...*" The Lord has always made His will available to man on the basis of "whosoever". That is, it is for all. The Lord is not partial. Contrary to some religious doctrines, He does not choose some and reject others. His love and invitation are extended to the entire world. In the story concerning the gospel being preached to Cornelius and his household, the record says, "*Then Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*" (Acts 10:34,35). Again Peter wrote, "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

Although the gospel is to be preached to all, and is for all, the Lord has not seen fit to force His will on anyone. It is up to each individual to decide what he will or will not do. Christ said, "*Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 10:32,33). Again, He said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:16).

One must hear and study the word of God that he might know

the Lord's will to make an intelligent choice. Paul said, "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). Christ said in John 5:39 that we should search the scriptures and Paul exhorted Timothy to study (2 Timothy 2:15). It is the truth that is important, and it is the truth that saves (John 8:32). We are told that the gospel has the power to save. Christ said that His word was spirit and His word was life.

Once one knows God's will and has made his choice in favor of Christ, then he must act upon his decision. It is not enough to know. Becoming a believer in Christ is not enough. These things are necessary, but for one to be saved he must *obey* the Lord's teachings. It is through one's obedience that he identifies himself with Christ. This lets the Lord know whose side this person is on.

Christ beautifully illustrated His point by saying that when one hears His teachings and does them, he is like a wise man who builds his house upon a rock. But let us think about this wise man and why he is called "wise". Anyone who knows anything about building a house knows that you don't begin to build just anywhere. You don't build on the sand or in a wet area. If one is wise, he will dig down until he comes to a bed of rock and he will build his house on that. With a proper foundation, a solid foundation, he can build with confidence that the house will stand. And so the man who builds on a rock is said to be a wise man. With the passing of time and with the coming of rain, and floods, and wind, and all kinds of bad weather, the house does not fall because it was founded on a rock. That is why he was called a wise man. Knowing the consequences of not building on a solid foundation, he was aware that if he wanted his house to stand and last for future use, he would have to build on a firm foundation.

The same is true with the individual who hears the sayings or

teachings of Christ, makes his decision to follow Him, and then obeys Him. This is a wise man. No one is *forcing* him to choose Christ, but knowing his need for the Lord, that he cannot save himself, and knowing the consequences of not choosing wisely, he becomes a believer in Christ and then proceeds to obey His will, being added to the Lord's church (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47). He is a Christian, a worshipper of the Lord, and a faithful worker (1 Peter 4:16; John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 15:58). Another way of putting it, when he obeys the teachings of Christ, he accepts Christ as his rock (Matthew 16:18), as his sure foundation. Paul tells us, "*For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 3:11). Building upon the rock, which is Christ Jesus, one is not only a part of the spiritual house, the church, but he has all the blessings of that house. He has God as his Father, brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord's presence, and all spiritual blessings.

Having built on Christ, the rock, and being a member or a part of the spiritual house, the church, one has complete assurance. The church of our Lord will stand forever (Hebrews 12:28). As long as one remains a faithful member of that house, then sin, the world, and all things therein, can never overpower or destroy him. Now, that is why one who hears the teachings of Christ, obeys them, and builds upon Christ, the spiritual rock, is said to be wise.

But take another look. Christ said that when one hears His sayings, and does not do them, he is like a foolish man. Please note that this man also had the opportunity to hear God's word, and he could also have been a wise man by obeying the Lord. Sadly, he chose not to obey. No one forced him to make his decision — it was his own choice. As a result the Lord said he was

like the foolish man who built upon the sand. Why was he being foolish? Because when one builds in a sandy area, that foundation will give way and the building will crumble and fall. If it doesn't happen before bad weather comes, it will certainly happen when the rains and floods and wind beat upon the house. It will fall because it does not have a solid foundation to hold it up. And so, all of the time, effort, materials, and expense that went into its construction are lost. Furthermore, the builder is left without a house, without protection and security for the future.

The same is true with the one who hears the sayings of Christ and does not obey them. That person is trusting in himself, in this world, in the teachings of men to safeguard his future, and these will eventually fail him. It is foolish to go through life without preparing adequately for the future. In such a case, one is left without salvation, without the care and blessings that the Lord can give him, and without any hope whatsoever for the future. Therefore he is very foolish.

I want to ask you now which person would you prefer to be, the wise man or the foolish man? There are worlds of people who are wise when it comes to this life, but in relation to their soul and spiritual matters, they are very foolish.

If you want to be wise, you must hear the teachings of Christ and obey them. You should begin by believing in God, repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized for the remission of your sins. When you do that, the Lord saves you and adds you to His church. And, of course, His church is built upon Christ, the rock (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47; Matthew 16:18,19). Having built on Christ, you are prepared wisely for the future. To build on any other foundation would be foolish.

## New Wine in Old Bottles

Jesus said, "*Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined*" (Matthew 9:17). In the verse prior to this one, He said, "*No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse*" (Matthew 9:16). Two different illustrations are used here to teach the same lesson. New cloth and old cloth do not go together. The new cloth is stronger and will hold, but the old cloth is weak and will give way. In relation to new wine being placed in old bottles, or old skins that were used to hold wine, water, etc., the idea is that new wine would ferment and expand, and the skins of the old bottles would already have expanded as much as they could. Not being able to bear the pressure, they would burst. New wine, therefore, must be put in new bottles or new skins and, because they are new, they can expand without breaking.

But surely there is a greater lesson in all of this than the points just made about new cloth and old cloth, new wine and old bottles — and there is! Jesus was born into the world at a time in which the law of Moses or the Old Testament law was still binding. He not only lived under the law but kept it perfectly. But a new law would soon come into existence. Christ Himself spent most of His time teaching principles that would be binding under that law. The main lesson He sought to teach concerning the new wine in old bottles, etc., was the fact that the new law which was coming could not be put within the confines of the old



law. Actually there would have to be a complete break between the two. One could not be pieced to the other. Both could not be binding at the same time, nor could a person keep both laws at the same time.

When we go back to Matthew 5:17,18 we have Jesus saying this: *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."* Many people misunderstand this passage even to this day. They think that these words support the idea that Jesus was teaching that the law would continue to be binding upon man as long as time shall stand. But as we have already pointed out, Christ was going to bring a new law into existence. For that to be done, the law that was binding would have to be removed. Jesus said here that it would not be *destroyed*, but rather it would be *fulfilled*. When a person contracts to do a job there are two ways to deal with that contract. He can tear it up and destroy it, refusing to carry out its terms, or he can fulfill the terms to completion. Once he does that, the contract ends. It doesn't continue to be binding, because the terms have been fulfilled. The same is true with the law of Moses under which Christ lived. He said that He had not come to destroy it, but He had come to fulfill it. He did that when He died on the cross. He said that not one jot or one tittle would pass from the law till all be fulfilled. That shows how important the fulfilling of every part of the law was, but it also tells us that it would be fulfilled. "Till all be fulfilled" placed a time limit on its duration. In other words, the old law would pass away once it was all fulfilled. If it was not going to end, why would the Lord have even brought up the subject?

In Luke 24:44 Christ said to the disciples, after His death, burial, and resurrection, *"These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."* These were the three major portions of scripture that prophesied of the Lord's coming and of the new law He would set up. Christ had now fulfilled all of the things written in these scriptures concerning Him. But going back to Matthew 5:17,18, Christ said the law would not pass away until all had been fulfilled. Therefore, if all things written in the law, the prophets and psalms concerning Him had been fulfilled, it means *the law was no longer in force.*

As Christ was dying on the cross, He said, *"It is finished"*, and then He died (John 19:30). The record also says, *"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split"* (Matthew 27:50,51). So, when Christ said *"It is finished"* and died, precisely at that minute the veil of the temple was rent from the top to the bottom. This is evidence of the fact that the rending was done by the hand of God and not of man. But what did this mean? It meant that, at this point, that old law was being removed, that it was fulfilled, that it would no longer be binding on man as a law. It also meant that, with the death of Christ upon the cross, He was bringing into existence a new law, a law for both Jews and Gentiles, a law based on better promises, a law of hope. When one really understands those points, he would never want to hold on to the Law of Moses, a law which ordinary men could never keep perfectly and which provided no Savior.

There are many other statements throughout the New Testament that confirm the fact that the old law had been replaced

by a new law. The very fact that you have the New Testament is an indication of that fact. In Hebrews 9:16,17, the writer says, *"For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives."* This means that God had a will, or a testament, or a covenant for His people. With the death of the testator, Jesus Christ Himself, the first testament ceased to be binding, and the second testament, or the new testament, came into force, sealed with the blood of Christ. Jesus said concerning the cup when instituting His memorial, *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28). In Hebrews 10:9, the writer again refers to both the first and second testaments, *"Then He said, Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God. He takes away the first that He may establish the second."*

Paul compares the new and old laws and he shows that in every sense the new is superior to the old. Listen to what he says: *"You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the Children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the*

*ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech — unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:2-16).*

From the foregoing it can be easily seen that the law of Moses is no longer binding. How could one read those verses and come to any other conclusion? Go back to Matthew 5 and read where the Lord refers to the law and how He shows the contrast between His teaching and the law of Moses on various points. The fact is, the law could not save, could not permanently take away sins, could not give one eternal life. Christ came to take away the law by fulfilling it and giving a new law that would provide man with all that the old law could not give — a Savior and the hope of life.

## Lesson 15

# The Great Invitation

Jesus said, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”* (Matthew 11:28-30).

Here we have what is generally referred to as the great invitation. Christ is inviting all people to come to Him. This is because every soul who has ever lived needs Him. There are a number of things that we want to point out about this passage.

We'll begin our study by noting that it was Christ who gave this invitation. He could invite people to come to Him because of who He was and because of what He had to offer. You and I can't do that. We are just human beings, people who need help. What can we offer anyone? Certainly we can't save anyone. The same is true with all other human beings. Man cannot save man. He is no savior. Even religious people are unable to save sinners. There are those, for sure, who assume roles of being founders of churches, heads of churches, supposedly performing miracles, and doing similar things. Some even go so far as to claim that they can represent God and have the authority to forgive sins. Such men are exploiting the masses. The Bible nowhere teaches such things. Neither has Christ authorized anyone to assume such roles or positions. We are told that it is not in man to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23).

Let us think about Christ, His credentials, and why He is able

to invite all people to come to Him. In the first place, He is God, He came from God, He is the Son of God in the flesh, He represents God, being God's spokesman. John tells us, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* (John 1:1). In John 1, we observe that the "Word" is identified as being Christ. Next, let us notice that God sent Him into this world to die that man might be saved. We read, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"* (John 3:16,17). But it was not enough for Christ to be born in the world. To save man it was necessary for Him to die for the sins of mankind. Paul said, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). Again, Paul writes, *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross"* (Philippians 2:5-8). The Hebrew writer said, *"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone"* (Hebrews 2:9).

Jesus not only came into this world and died on the cross for the sins of the world, but after being buried, He arose three days later as a victorious Lord over death, hell, and the grave. Returning to the Father in heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God and there He remains to this day, reigning as King of

kings and Lord of lords. It is because of this that He is able to invite all people to come to Him.

This invitation is directed to sinful man. Christ said that He had not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). Paul said, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The gospel, the good news that Christ died, was buried, and was resurrected that man might be saved, was to be preached to all mankind. It encouraged man to believe in God, to repent of his sins, turning away from them, to confess Christ as the Son of God, and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. After Peter and the apostles had preached the gospel to the people on the day of Pentecost, many in the audience became believers and wanted to know what else they should do. Peter said, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:38). The record says that some three thousand gladly received the word and were baptized. Then we read in Acts 2:47, "*And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*"

Christ pictures man as doing the works of the flesh, being burdened down with sin and problems and the troubles of this world. He is blind, and lost, condemned by a guilty conscience, with no way to merit forgiveness, and he must suffer the consequences of his sins. Paul said that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). One cannot go through this life being immoral, evil, and opposing God without having to pay a heavy price. Even at best, he must live a down-graded life in comparison to the Christian. Think of the calibre of people the sinner associates with — more sinners, those who are thieves, murderers, adulterers, drunkards, liars, gamblers, cheaters, those who curse God,

the wicked, the evil, the ungodly, and all people who are of the devil (Galatians 5:19-21). But the worst is yet to come: after being grouped with such people in this life, as sinners they have no eternal hope, and have nothing to look forward to but a devil's hell where they will have to spend all of eternity with the worst kind of people. The Lord promises in His word, "*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death*" (Revelation 21:7,8).

Do you want to go through this life with evil associates, and then spend eternity, with the same kind of people? Do you really feel that you have a good life, living as you are? Perhaps you have never known of a better way, and you have nothing to compare your life to. But let me assure you, there is a better way. Christ offers that way. He said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me*" (John 14:6). And let me also suggest that the Lord's invitation is extended to you and to all other lost people of all the world. Whether you are at the top or at the bottom in the world of sin, He invites you to come to Him. Whether you are religious or nonreligious, He invites you to come. He loves your soul, He died for you, He wants you to be saved. Whether you are young or old, well or sick, good or bad, He wants you to come. Regardless of the color of your skin, the country of your birth, the language you speak, or any other factor, He wants you to come.

If you will come to Him, and as pointed out earlier, if you will come *on His terms*, that is, believing in Him, repenting of your sins, confessing Him as the Son of God, and if you will be



baptized for the remission of your sins, then He will save you. He will give you rest from your labors, from your burdens, from all of your sins. A great weight will be lifted from your shoulders. Wouldn't you like that? Once you obey Him and experience what salvation is like, you would never want to go back to the old way.

But that's not all. Christ says that if you are going to be a follower of His, you must take His yoke upon you. A yoke was used with farm animals, keeping them together and enabling them to pull a heavier load. Through obedience to the gospel, one enters Christ. Upon becoming a follower of Christ one is to take the Lord's yoke upon himself, pulling together with Christ and with other Christians to do the Lord's work. Christ also says that, as one does this, he is to learn of Him. And, of course, the more one learns of Christ the more he will recognize that Jesus is meek and lowly in heart, and that He will not demand more of man than he is able to do. At the same time, He promises that we will find rest for our soul. There is nothing more satisfying than serving the Lord.

Christ concludes His invitation by saying that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. In other words, in comparison to what Christ has done for man, He expects so little in return of those who would follow Him. The burden that man bears in sin is far greater, and it ends only in death.

My friend, the Lord invites you to come to Him. He has something for you. He can save you and give you rest from your sin. I would like to encourage you to hear His call and to respond to Him.

## A Divided Kingdom

In Matthew 12:22-30 we read, *"Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, Could this be the Son of David? Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad."*

There are several lessons that we want to draw from the scripture we have just read, but the major happening here centers around Christ having cast out a devil. The Pharisees accused Him of casting it out by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. Christ answered them by explaining that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, and that if Satan casts out Satan, then how can his kingdom stand?

The first major point I want to make is that Christ was from

God, He was the Son of God, and He had the power to cast out devils and to miraculously heal all manner of diseases. He had confronted the devil earlier, and after defeating him on three different occasions, the devil had left Him (Matthew 4). Christ was the very opposite of what the devil was and what he stood for. Our Lord came to help people, to save them, and to give them hope. The devil came to deceive, to hurt, and to destroy the souls of men. Christ had power over him, and the very fact that He was able to cast him out was proof that He was not an agent of the chief of devils, Beelzebub. If Christ was from the devil, He certainly would not cast Himself out of the blind and mute man. Therefore, those who accused Him of doing His work by the power of the devil were wrong and were only trying to find fault with Him, not understanding the way the devil works.

The second point I want to make here is also based on what took place when Jesus cast out a devil and the reasoning He used to prove that He had not done the miracle by the power of Satan. The same principle will apply today in reverse in this situation: there are numerous preachers throughout the world who claim that they have the power to cast out Satan. They take people who are thought to be "demon possessed", pray over them, and command the evil spirits to leave them in the name of Jesus Christ. But we can be assured that they cannot do such things. Why? Because they are in churches that the Lord did not establish, they wear names of men, and preach things that are in conflict with what the Bible teaches. Such preachers only pretend to cast out Satan, but in reality they do not, they cannot. Of course the afflicted people never were "demon possessed", at least not in the way that Satan possessed people in the days of Christ and the apostles. In those times it seems that Satan was allowed to enter people and to control them, so that Christ and the apostles could

cast them out, thereby showing that their power was greater than the power that Satan had (John 9:2,3).

But what about today? The Lord's power and the authenticity of His word, have already been confirmed by the signs and wonders performed by the ones who were revealing God's will. We don't have to cast out devils or perform miracles to prove the power of the Lord over Satan or to prove that the Lord's word is from God. Now proofs are not continually required to produce faith in the hearts of unbelievers. Paul says that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), and Christ commanded that His gospel be taken to every creature under heaven so that all might be able to hear the word of God and to believe it (Mark 16:15,16). Finally, Paul tells us that the gospel has the power to save all who will believe (Romans 1:16,17). Don't be deceived by false teachers who go around claiming to cast out devils and perform miracles.

In Acts, we have a story similar to the claims of "miracle workers" today. There were seven sons of a man named Sceva who were not followers of Christ but who had heard of the miracles being done by Paul's hands. These men decided they would perform miracles, too. So in the name of "*Jesus whom Paul preaches*", they ordered a demon to leave a man. Interestingly, the demon knew more about Christ and His followers than the men did. He replied, "*Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?*" If demons actually did possess people today, and preachers who are not members of the Lord's church tried to cast them out, the demons would be challenging them with the same question today: "*Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?*"

The third point that I want to make here is that the Lord laid

down the principle that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Of course, Christ was saying to the Pharisees that if He was doing His work by the power of Beelzebub, that would have meant that Satan's kingdom was divided and that it could not stand. The answer was obvious. Surely the devil would not oppose himself. The conclusion was also obvious: Christ was not casting out Satan by the power of Satan.

But there is a broader principle here that I would like for us to consider: The Lord has a kingdom, often called the church, and it is one, it is united, and it preaches unity. As a result, it is able to stand and to do the work that the Lord would have it to do. At the same time there are many churches or denominational groups in the world that claim to represent Christ and His kingdom. They say that all of them together make up the one church or one kingdom. But if their claims are true, it means that the church is divided; and a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, or cannot last. In other words, it will finally fall or be destroyed.

In John 17:20-23, Christ prayed for unity, that His people might all be one. Hear Him: *"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."*

Does that sound as though the Lord would place His blessings on all kinds of churches, groups, bodies, denominations and

organizations that claim to be following Him? Today in the so-called Christian world there is every kind of group that you can imagine, all kinds of names are being used, all kinds of teachings are going out. There is division on every hand, and yet they claim that it is all of God. My friend, God is not the author of this confusion and division. The Lord has but one kingdom, or church, and it is not divided.

The Bible condemns division by pleading for unity and pointing out the sin of division. Division was rearing its ugly head in the church at Corinth, but it was condemned and corrected. Paul exhorted the Corinthian Christians, *"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Corinthians 1:10). Again, in writing to the Romans, he said, *"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple"* (Romans 16:17,18). Please note that he said that those who cause divisions do not serve the Lord Jesus.

All of this means that most of what you see in the religious world that supposedly represents Christ does not represent Him. The Lord and His church are not divided. They are united. That which is divided is not of God. Does that mean that Satan is divided against himself? No, because it is the work of Satan to create confusion and division among those who believe in Christ. In doing this, he is not working against himself, but for himself, in the interest of his own cause. Whose side are you on?

The fourth point I want to make is that when Christ cast out devils, it demonstrated that He was from God and that He had power over Satan. Those people who witnessed His work should have been convinced. But the Pharisees, a sect of that day, only found fault with Him. This reminds us of what often happens in our day. When the Lord's word is taught, setting forth the truth and condemning error, often those who hear it reject the truth and take their stand with those who are in error. This is sad, but Jesus said that many would turn from Him, because they love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

The fifth and final point is this: Jesus said to those who were present when He cast out the devil that if they were not *with* Him, they were *against* Him. This principle is still true. There is no way to be for the Lord and against Him at the same time. It is not possible to be with the Lord and with Satan at the same time. One must make up his mind and take a stand, one way or the other.

My friend, where do you stand? Do you believe that Christ is the Son of God? If not, I pray that you will seriously consider Christ, His miracles, and His teachings. Look at His death, burial, resurrection, His kingdom, His religion. Surely all of this means something. I believe that if you will take a close look, and study the facts, you will come to believe. If you will repent of your sins, confess that Christ is the Son of God, and then be baptized for the remission of your sins, the Lord will save you and add you to His church. Please think seriously about these things and see what you can do about them.

# Every Plant My Father Has Not Planted

Jesus said, *“Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted”* (Matthew 15:13).

What did Jesus mean when He made that statement? He was affirming a fact that has always been true. Anything that He did not plant, or that did not originate with Him, will eventually be rooted up and destroyed. It will be destroyed because it represents that which is substituted for the Lord's way. It is, therefore, not according to His will; it is not by His authority.

Only one type of seed can be planted by God's authority: the seed of truth. That seed is His Word, the Bible and, more specifically, the New Testament for the current age. No seed, other than His word, can be sown with God's blessings.

Now let me illustrate how one seed produces one type of harvest in the physical world. For example, we are all familiar with rice. Suppose a farmer takes a bag of rice seed out to his land and there he sows it. What will it produce? It will bring forth rice, of course. If he allows it to grow there or transplants it to cover a larger area, what kind of harvest will he eventually get? He will get rice, and rice only.

Now, let's continue with the illustration. Suppose some of that same rice seed is taken to another country and planted there. What will it produce? Again, it will produce rice. Then some of that same rice seed might be dispatched to different parts of the



world. What will it produce in various countries around the world? The same, wherever it is. It will result in rice only. Would it be possible that it might bring forth corn, cotton, tomatoes, wheat, or some other type of harvest? Never. Why? Because according to the law of nature, a seed will produce only after its own kind.

But again, suppose a man goes out to a field to plant his rice seed, but when it comes forth he discovers that he not only has some rice, but he also has some other plants as well. These might include wheat, corn, watermelon, etc. Would this be any great mystery to solve? Not actually; even a school boy would know that obviously some other types of seed got mixed with his rice seed, and that is why different types of plants came forth. It is just that simple.

Now, let's switch from natural, physical seed, to spiritual seed and see if the same principle works in the spiritual realm. We have already noted that in this case the seed is the word of God, or the word of God is the seed. To really appreciate this lesson, you need to have a good knowledge of the scripture. As you go through the Lord's word, you will see how Christ commanded the apostles to take the gospel, the message of salvation, into all the world and preach it to every creature (Mark 16:15). In so doing, you see, they would be sowing the seed, which is the word of God, in the hearts and minds of men and women everywhere. Once that seed germinated, creating faith, it would begin to produce results. That is, faith would produce souls obedient to the gospel (Acts 2:38; 2:47; 1 Peter 4:16).

But let's get a little more specific. Suppose a preacher takes the word of God to some city, and he preaches and teaches it faithfully, just as it is. What will be the results? Well, the Lord

said, "*Therefore by their fruits you will know them*" (Matthew 7:20). That is, if the word of God, the pure seed, was planted in the hearts of men and women, and they responded to it by obeying it, they would all obey the same gospel, believing, repenting of their sins, confessing Christ, and being baptized for the remission of their sins as set forth in Acts 2. They would all be added to the same church, the church of Christ (Matthew 16:18). They would all wear the same name, the name Christian (Acts 11:26). They would all worship alike (John 4:24). In other words, they would all be exactly alike.

If that same gospel was taken to another country, it would produce the same fruit there. Not only that, but wherever the word of God, the seed, might be taken throughout the world, the same results would follow. But suppose another person goes out somewhere and preaches the word of God, the seed, and as a result different types of denominational people begin to spring forth, forming different churches, with different names, doctrines, and practices. Should that happen, the explanation should be obvious. The individual or individuals who planted the seed did not plant *only* the word of God in the hearts of their hearers. They might have taken the Bible with them, and preached some of it, but they also took along their own theories and ideas and the various teachings of men. In their preaching, they planted those different things in the minds of their hearers, and because of it, they got a mixed harvest.

With this picture in mind, let me remind you that when a plant comes forth, which was not produced by the word of God, and does not belong to the Lord, He warns that He will root it up and destroy it. He may not do it just now, but eventually He will root it up and cast it into the fire that it may be burned up.

How would we know that a church or a doctrine is not of the Lord? That is simple. Ask some questions of the local preacher or learn the answers from your own observations and studies of the Bible:

1. Can I read of this church in the Bible?
2. What is the history of this church? When did it first begin, and who was its founder?
3. What are individual members called?
4. What do they teach a person to do to be saved?
5. Do they worship on the first day of the week, and according to the pattern of the New Testament?
6. Have they added doctrines that are not in the New Testament?
7. Are they teaching the morals, values, and laws taught in the New Testament?

Measuring a group and its teachings by the word of God will tell you whether or not this plant is one that God authorizes or one that He will root up. In Matthew 7:16-20, the Lord said, *"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them."*

My friends, if the seed is the word of God, how can man substitute his own teaching and produce anything worthwhile? The fruit of a tree or plant will not lie. It tells one and all the kind of

plant it is and the kind of seed that produced it. A good tree will not produce bad fruit but a bad tree will not produce good fruit. You cannot expect the teaching of man to produce good fruit, and neither will the teaching of Christ produce bad fruit. If a tree is bad it is good for nothing but to be cut down and thrown into the fire. If an individual or church is contrary to God's will — and certainly it cannot produce good fruit if it came from the teaching of men or false doctrines — then it is good for nothing but to be cut down or rooted up to be destroyed.

If I were you, and I was a member of some denominational group, or following something that cannot be found in the word of God and is not authorized by the Lord, then I would want to get out of that as soon as possible. If the Lord did not plant it, if it did not originate with Him, if He does not authorize its existence, then it will eventually be rooted up and cast into the fire.

Finally, even as the Lord's people, we must bear fruit for Him or else we will be cut off from the vine and destroyed. The vine represents Christ and the church, and the branches represent Christians, members of the church. As such we belong to the Lord, and we must be faithful to Him until death, if we are to be eternally saved.

Who are you? What are you? Do you represent that which the Lord will have to root up and destroy? If you have not complied with His wishes, you are lost. Or are you one who has heard the word of God, obeyed it, and are bearing the kind of fruit that the Lord can use?

If you are not a Christian, then you are not what the Lord would have you to be. You can remedy that by obeying the Lord, by believing, repenting of your sins, confessing Him as the Son

of God, and by being baptized for the remission of your sins. When you do that, the Lord will save you and add you to His church. Then you can bear precious fruit to His honor and glory.

Think about this — study the word of God for yourself, and decide to obey the Lord. Your soul and where you will spend eternity depend on it.

## Lesson 18

# The Keys of the Kingdom

In Matthew 16:13-19 we read, *“When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they said, Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

In this lesson we want to consider the keys of the kingdom, but first we need to visualize the setting of the above text. Jesus and the apostles were in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, a city north of Galilee. On this occasion, Jesus called the disciples around Him and asked them what others thought of Him. It seems He wanted to hear them say what the thinking of the general public was concerning Himself; that is, whether they looked on Him as being just another prophet, or in fact, the Son of God. Sure enough, his disciples had heard various things, so they told Him that some thought He was John the Baptist, others thought He was Elias or Elijah, and still others thought He was Jeremias or Jeremiah, and finally, there were others who thought He was

one prophet or another. Of course Jesus was not any of these, and He must not have been too pleased with the report He was given.

But then He turned to the apostles, those who had been with Him, those whom He had personally taught, who had seen His miracles, and He wanted to know what they thought about Him. Peter spoke up for the group and said, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" This evidently made the Lord very happy. He responded by saying that flesh and blood had not revealed that truth to him, but the Father in heaven. That is, Peter had not gotten his information through a worldly source, but from God Himself. He and the other apostles had heard the word of God taught, as taught by Christ, and they had seen the miracles of Christ, which again came through the power of God. Therefore, they had been convinced through all that they had seen and heard that Christ was from God, the Son of God.

Following this welcomed confession, Christ said, "*And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church*" There are some who read this account and assume that since Peter is mentioned here, he is the chief or the head of the apostles, and therefore that Christ was saying that He was going to build His church upon Peter. Of course such people misunderstand what is being said here and jump to erroneous conclusions. It is true that Peter's name stands out above the names of the other apostles, but any time you have a group of people, someone will probably speak up on behalf of the others. Peter seems to have been a leader among the disciples, but that is the only significance one can attach to what happened here.

When Christ said that He would build His church upon a rock, He was not referring to Peter as being that rock. Rather, Peter had just confessed that Jesus was the Son of God. Christ's

response was to the truth of that confession. He, therefore, declared that it was on that truth, the fact that He was the Son of God, that He would build His church. To be convinced of this, just look through the scriptures and see who is said to be the rock, the sure foundation, the chief corner stone (1 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20). That foundation is Christ.

Jesus wanted to be sure of the kind of faith the apostles had in Him before proceeding with His work. Having been assured by Peter's confession, Jesus said that He would build His church upon the fact that He was the Son of God, and that even the gates of hell, or His death, would not prevent Him from building His church. As we read on through the scriptures, we are told of the Lord's death on the cross, of His subsequent burial and resurrection and return to the Father in heaven, but after all these things happened, His church had its beginning on the day of Pentecost, as we read in Acts 2. Jesus kept His word, and became the sure foundation in which His followers' lives are built. And, I might add, the church today rests not on Peter, a mere man, or even as an apostle, but upon the fact that Christ is the Son of the living God.

With that setting in mind, we will go on to consider the rest of our text. After promising that He would build His church, that nothing would prevent Him from building it, Jesus proceeded to say to Peter and the apostles — and I might say that Christ was speaking to *all* of the apostles — that, *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* For us to understand what Christ was saying, there are several things we must clear up. First, what is the kingdom that He speaks of here? What had He just been talking about?



He had been discussing the fact that He was going to build His church. Does that mean that the church was the kingdom and the kingdom was the church? There would be no way to escape this conclusion if you read on through the New Testament.

Jesus often spoke of the kingdom of heaven; meaning that it was from heaven, or that it would be a heavenly or spiritual organization. A kingdom involves territory, laws, subjects, and a king. Contrary to the thinking of the Jews of His day, and to the expectation of many people today, the kingdom the Lord spoke of was not going to be a political or earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one. Christ used the word "kingdom" because the people of that day lived in kingdoms and understood that terminology. But it would also be called "the church", and it was primarily called that after its establishment as recorded in Acts 2. "Church" would suggest that it would consist of a "called out group of people".

We know that the kingdom was established, as was prophesied in Isaiah 2:2,3 and Daniel 2:44, and other passages, because we read in Acts 19:8 and Acts 28:23 of the preaching done concerning the kingdom of God, as being in existence. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 12:28 that *we have received the kingdom* that cannot be moved. Paul said in Colossians 1:13,14 that the Colossians had been delivered from the power of darkness and *translated into the kingdom* of God's dear Son. At the same time, the church was not only promised by Christ, according to Matthew 16:18, but we are told that some three thousand souls heard the gospel and obeyed it on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem. As a result, the Lord added the saved *to His church* (Acts 2). Going on through the scriptures we read time and again of the church, as in Ephesians 5. But what does all of this mean?

It just simply means that the church and the kingdom are the same organization or institution.

The Lord said that He would give to the apostles the keys of the kingdom, or the church, and that whatever they bound on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. What does this mean? First, what is the significance of a key? What does it do? A key is an instrument that fits inside a lock to fasten it or to open it. It can be used to exclude or allow admittance. In this case, it is a teaching that is used to unlock or explain truths for people, so that they may enter a new organization — the church or kingdom of Christ.

The “keys of the kingdom” has reference to the authority that Christ would give to the apostles to preach and teach His word, making it possible for their hearers to know what to do to be saved and how to enter the Lord’s kingdom. It would mean that what they bound, or required, would be required in heaven and what they loosed, or would not require, would not be required in heaven. Of course they would be directed by the Holy Spirit to speak only the truth (John 16:13), and Christ would give them the Great Commission to take the gospel into all the world (Mark 16:15,16).

In Acts 2 we read where the apostles used those keys for the first time when they preached the gospel to a large group of people gathered on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem. The record says, *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said to them, Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy*

*Spirit*" (Acts 2:37,38). What did the apostles do? They preached the gospel to those people, and told them what they must do to be saved. They used the keys that the Lord had given them, and showed the audience how they could be saved and enter the Lord's church. Then the record says, "*For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, Be saved from this perverse generation*" (Acts 2:39,40). As you can see, those people were not members of the church before this time, but verse 41 says that they were added to it, some three thousand of them. How did they enter? By the keys, the truths preached, being used to make it possible for them to enter. But it was not enough for the door, so to speak, to be unlocked to them. They had to enter, and the only way they could enter was through believing those truths that were preached, and then by obeying the Lord's teaching. As a result they were saved and were added to the church.

We are still using those keys today; that is, we are preaching God's word, revealing what the Lord has instructed so that man, through his obedience, might enter the church or kingdom of our Lord.

## Lesson 19

# If Any Man Will Come After Me

Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24). In Luke's version of this statement, Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."* (Luke 9:23).

It is a great honor to be able to follow Christ, but it carries with it some responsibility. There are conditions with which we must comply. Not every one is ready to obey Him. Some think they want to follow Christ until they find out what is required.

We have a story in the scripture of some men who were not willing to pay the price to follow Jesus. We read, *"Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, Lord, I will follow You wherever You go. And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head. Then He said to another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, let me first go and bury my father. Jesus said to him, Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house. But Jesus said to him, No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:57-62).

In the foregoing portion of scripture we read a number of fac-

tors concerning following Christ. We need to personally give some thought to these matters so that we can more fully understand what it means to follow Him.

First, we read of a man who approached Christ and announced that he wanted to follow Him. He was very sure of himself. He said that he was ready to follow the Lord wherever He might go. Jesus responded by simply pointing out that foxes and birds have homes, but that He had nowhere even to lay His head. In these words He was saying that one who was following Him for material gains, or for security would be disappointed, because He Himself had nothing of this world's goods. Everything belonged to Him, and yet nothing belonged to Him. After hearing these words, evidently this man changed his mind about his desire to walk with Jesus. So often today there are those who are ready to follow Christ if there is some material gain. They understand Christianity to be only a hand-out religion. They come for the loaves and fishes. They are looking for a job, for something, for anything. But if that is all that one is looking for, then he will generally be disappointed. Christ blesses His people, but not always in the way one expects to be blessed. The Christian often has to sacrifice to follow Christ. He may have to suffer persecution. He may be called on to give when he is hoping to receive. This is the real test of being a follower of Christ. Those who are not serious, who have ulterior motives, and who are not willing to pay the price, will drop by the wayside eventually.

Jesus invited another man to follow Him. This man said that he first needed to go and bury his father. Jesus explained that he should let the dead bury the dead; that is, let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead, but that he should go and preach the

kingdom of God. Obviously, the man had nothing but an excuse for not following Christ. Even today, man has not changed at all. He still uses his family as the means of excusing himself from service. There are those who say they will become a Christian when their spouse decides to. Some blame their relatives for not attending worship. Still others refuse to go into other parts of the world to preach the gospel because they don't want to leave home, or their parents are old and don't want them to go, or their children need to be educated and on and on the excuses go.

Once more when Jesus invited someone to follow Him, the man explained that first he wanted to go home and say goodbye to those of his household. Jesus, of course, knew his heart and knew that he was not really serious about following Him. Again, in our own day most people, when approached about becoming a Christian or following Christ, answer by making excuses. It is this excuse, or that excuse, and a thousand other things. Don't they know Who they are turning down? They are refusing an invitation from Christ, the very Son of God! How many would turn down the invitation of a Prime Minister, a President, a King, or a Queen? This shows our priorities.

Finally, Jesus said that if one placed his hand to the plough and looked back, that he was not fit for the kingdom of God. There must have been farmers in Jesus' audience, who were familiar with this type of language. It was well known that if one put his hand to the plough, then looked back, he could not plough a straight row. The lesson that Jesus was teaching here was that if one began to follow Him and then looked back at the world, being attracted to it, tempted by it, remembers it, and longing to go back to it, then that individual would not be fit for the kingdom of God. The kingdom that Jesus spoke of on this occasion

had not yet been established, but it would be. And in that kingdom He would need those who would continue to follow Him all the days of their lives. Likewise, the Lord today needs people who are serious enough about following Him that once they begin, they will continue as faithful followers. Quitters are losers, both for themselves and also for the Lord's cause.

As we read in the beginning, Jesus said that if a person was going to follow Him, several things would be expected of him. Of course, the Lord invites all to follow Him. He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). His invitation is extended to all mankind (Matthew 11:28-30). It is up to each individual to decide what he is going to do. The Lord forces no one to follow Him, but if one *chooses* to follow Christ, he should keep in mind that Christ makes the following conditional.

In the first place, to be a follower of Christ one must *hear* Christ, *learn* of Him, and become a *believer* in Him (Matthew 17:5; 11:28-30; John 14:1). Next, one must *repent* of his sins, *confess* Christ as the Son of God, and then *be baptized* to have his sins washed away (Luke 13:3; Romans 10:10; Acts 22:16). Once one does that, the Lord saves him and he is added to the church (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47). As such, one becomes a Christian and a follower of Christ (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 2:21).

But beyond all of this, Christ said that if we are going to follow Him we must *deny* ourselves. This means that we must quit trusting in ourselves, and we must give ourselves totally and completely to the Lord. We must deny the world, in other words, turn from any and everything that would hinder us from following Christ. Next, He says that we must take up His cross if we are going to follow Him. His cross, in this case, would have reference to His cause, His work, or whatever one needs to do to be

true and faithful to Him. This requires time and effort. We must work at it, even give our very lives to it. One cannot expect to follow Christ and reap all His blessings without investing anything himself. And finally, Jesus says that this must be done on a daily basis. Most people are under the false impression that Christianity is a one-day-a-week religion; that is, Christians are to give the Lord's Day, Sunday (or an hour or two of it), to Christ, but the rest of the week one may live as he pleases. That is not true. The Lord expects us to follow Him daily, every day of our life. There is no "time off" in Christianity. But daily service, daily worship, daily giving, daily praying, daily studying, daily living will bring daily results, daily blessings, and daily happiness. Yes, it means more to follow Christ than just to say that you are following Him.

When one follows the Lord faithfully, there will be blessings beyond measure. Peter and the disciples were concerned about this, and the record says, *"Then Peter answered and said to Him, See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have? So Jesus said to them, Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first"* (Matthew 19:27-30). Christ was saying that when we follow Him out of sincerity and loyalty, and we prove it through our service and sacrifice to His cause, then He will bless us a hundred times over in this life, and in the world to come He will give us eternal life. You couldn't find a better deal than that anywhere in the world! It pays to be a Christian!



## Lesson 20

# The Value of the Soul

Jesus said, *“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26).

According to the words of Jesus, the soul is the most valuable thing in all the world. Are you aware of that? What does your soul mean to you? How much do you value your soul?

In this study we want to make a number of observations concerning the soul. We will begin by defining the soul. The word soul is used in a number of ways in the scriptures, but we are thinking of it as being the immortal spirit of the individual which dwells within his physical body. It is God-created, invisible to the human eye, and will never die. Going back to the first book of the Bible and the story of creation, we read concerning the creation of man, *“Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”* (Genesis 1:26,27). We also read, *“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being”* (Genesis 2:7). From these verses of scripture we learn that God created man and woman in His own image. What is the image of God? For sure, this does not refer to a physical image. Rather, we are told that God is a spirit (John 4:24), and if God created man in His image or like-

ness, then it must be that God made man as a spirit or a soul, an inner being in a fleshly body. God described man as being "a living soul".

The scriptures teach that the soul lives on after death. In Luke 16:19-31, Christ told the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Both died and the record says that Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, the place of the righteous dead. The rich man also died, and we are told that in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment. This means that the souls of both of these men lived on after their physical death, and one was saved and the other was lost.

The scriptures also teach that the soul will never die. Speaking of the wicked and the righteous, Christ said, "*And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life*" (Matthew 25:46). In Matthew 10:28, He said, "*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" Of course it is said that, when the wicked are cast into hell, they experience the second death; that is, they live on but are separated from God. In the same sense, we are told that the soul that sins will die. Hear the Creator as He says, "*Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die*" (Ezekiel 18:4). The wise man said that when it comes time for man to die, "*Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it*" (Ecclesiastes 12:7). In other words, God gave man a spirit or soul and in the end it will return to God, at which time it will be judged, to spend eternity either in heaven or hell.

All human beings have a soul. This is what distinguishes them from lower animal life. An animal dies and that is the end,

but man is immortal, with a mind to choose between good and evil. Because he has the ability to think and to reason, to make decisions, he must answer to his Creator for his actions.

The soul of man needs to be saved. When one is born into this world he is pure and whole; he is without sin. But as he grows up and reaches the age of accountability, knowing right from wrong, he becomes a sinner. We are told that all such accountable beings have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 5:8; Luke 19:10). In Acts 2 we read of a large number of people having the opportunity to hear the gospel. They then wanted to know what to do. Peter and the apostles told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. Peter warned that they should save themselves, that is, by acting on what they had heard. Finally we read, *"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"* (Acts 2:41). Please observe that the writer describes them as being souls who were obedient, and that the Lord added them to the church. They were souls indeed. In obeying God they had saved their souls from sin. This is what all accountable souls must do if they are to be saved in this world and in the world to come.

The soul is, therefore, valuable. It is the most precious possession that one could ever have. Having an immortal soul, every human is rich. He may not realize it, or recognize it, but it is true. Even the world and all of its wealth cannot compare to the value of one soul. The earth and all things therein shall finally be destroyed and burned up, but the soul will never be destroyed. It will live on forever and forever.

You have a soul. What value do you place on your soul? Are you like a lot of people, and act as though you don't have one?

Are you going through this life as though the material and physical things are all that count? I want to remind you that one of these days you will have to leave this world; then what? Unless you prepare your soul for that day, you will be in trouble. It means that the most precious thing you have will be lost forever. Not only that, you will have to suffer throughout all eternity because of your carelessness and neglect in dealing with your soul. Now you might think that would be unfair, and yet the Lord has given you a lifetime to prepare your soul to meet Him. Christ died that you might be saved. He has revealed His will, giving instructions on what to do to be saved. He has provided every opportunity for you to be saved. If you fail to take advantage of all that He has done, you will simply have to suffer the consequences. The Apostle Paul tells us that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23).

Please consider the words of Jesus again when He said, *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”* We remember that Judas betrayed our Lord for thirty pieces of silver. Millions of people around the world sell their souls for much less. They sell their souls for money, for worldly pleasure, for position in this world, and a thousand other things. When you lie, steal, kill, commit adultery, cheat on your examination, hate your brother, get drunk, bribe, etc, then you are selling your soul. These things are called the works of the flesh, and they are worldly, sinful, and opposed to all that is good and right. Those who do them cannot be saved if they continue in that way of life (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 John 2:15-17). Many others sell their souls when they follow the teachings of men in relation to religious and spiritual matters. The amazing thing here is the fact that God has revealed His will, and if one would take the

time to study it, he could know the truth and obey it. It is when one fails to be concerned that he finds himself in a position where he can be deceived and misled and thus to be lost. Christ said, *"Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21).

Christ asked another question concerning the soul, and that question is, *"Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* When you reach the age of accountability, knowing right from wrong, then you automatically become a sinner. As a sinner, your soul is lost. If you realize the value of your soul, what are you willing to give or to give up to redeem your soul or to gain it back? If you ignore it, neglect it, then it will continue to be lost. If you are aware of it, recognize its great value, and you want to be clean and pure from sin, then you must be willing to pay a price. In that case, what would you be willing to give or exchange for your soul? Would you be willing to deny the world, give up your wrong-doing, quit your bad habits? Would you be willing to change your life? Would you be willing to change masters, from Satan to Christ? Christ can save your soul, and will save your soul, but only if you obey Him, and give your life to Him, making Him your Lord and Master. Christ said, *"No man can serve two masters."* So the decision is yours — it depends on the value you place on your soul.

If you will hear God's word, believe in God, and believe in Christ as the Son of God (Hebrews 11:6; John 14:1), repent of all your sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), and then be baptized to wash away your sins (Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38), the Lord will save you and make you a new creature (Mark 16:16; John 3:3-5; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Having your soul cleansed of all sin, if you

continue to follow Christ and to worship Him, to faithfully serve Him all the days of your life, He will continue to forgive you so that, one day, heaven itself will be yours (1 John 1:8; Revelation 2:10). All of this might sound like a tale, make-believe stuff, or a too-good-to-be-true story, but it is the truth. Please read and study your Bible or New Testament yourself and see if it doesn't make sense.

If you value your soul, which is the only valuable thing in this world that you possess, then I hope you will continue to think on these things and that you will study until you are convinced of what you need to do. I pray that you will have the conviction and courage sufficient to do it.

## Lesson 21

# A Little Child

In Matthew 18:1-6, we have these words: *“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”*

You will observe from this reading that Jesus took a little child and taught a number of valuable lessons. Not only did the disciples need these things pointed out to them, but they are also needed in today's world.

The setting here which brought on these lessons was that the disciples came to the Lord, wanting to know who will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Isn't that just like man? There is always someone wanting to be the greatest, even in the kingdom. The kingdom which is spoken of here — the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom that would come from heaven or God — had not yet been established on earth. It was going to come, and did come, shortly thereafter. But the disciples were concerned as to who would be the greatest. This shows that there was a misunderstanding of the kingdom on their part. Also, it showed their carnal pride, striving for position.

A little later we see more of this attitude, as recorded in Matthew 20:20-29: *"Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, What do you wish? She said to Him, Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They said to Him, We are able. So He said to them, You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father. And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

I think you can see from this setting that the Lord's idea of greatness is the very opposite of man's way of thinking.

The purpose of the Lord's kingdom, or church, is not to encourage man to seek position and to become great in the eyes of men. The church around the world is made up of thousands of individual congregations. Although there is fellowship among all of them, still each congregation is autonomous, or independent from all the others. Christ is the head of the church as one entire body, and He is the head of each congregation. There is no



man on earth who can speak for all the church as a whole. There is no man recognized as the head of the church with a headquarters on earth. Each congregation is to have its own local leadership, the men of the congregation, or elders, where there are two or more qualified to be appointed as elders (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). There are to be deacons to assist the elders, and then the local preachers, teachers, and members. But these are all local, and that is as high as one can go in the church, as far as position is concerned. Instead of encouraging man to try to rise to an exalted position, Christ encourages His people to humble themselves and to be willing to serve and help their fellowman. This is worth far more to the cause of Christ than having a few people strut around in their pomp, pride, and glory, feeling better than everyone else, having their fellow-men to bow before them and to serve them. Such exaltation of humans only creates envy, hatred, and jealousy, and no one is benefitted by this type of thing.

Again, the Lord forbids His people to wear names and titles given by men. Jesus said, *"But you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Matthew 23:8-12). These words speak for themselves and all would do well to take heed. We of the churches of Christ do not use names and titles, such as father, pastor, bishop, reverend, doctor, etc., in the way that men use them in religious circles.

Going back to our original text, Jesus called a little child unto Him and said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted*

*and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" He further stated that if one would humble himself as a little child, he would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. What did He mean by this statement? What was His point? He was saying that a little child is pure, innocent, forgiving, humble, and has all the qualities that should be found in Christ's disciples. As a matter of fact, Jesus said that unless they were converted or changed their lives so that they would have these qualities of a little child, they could not enter the kingdom of heaven, or the church, once it came into existence. He was also saying that those who became as innocent as little children would be the kind of people considered the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

While we are discussing these points, I would like to impress on your mind the fact that Jesus is teaching that a little child is born without sin, that he or she is pure and innocent until they reach the age of knowing right from wrong, and therefore become accountable to God. I am pointing this out just now because there are many people who believe that a child is born with sin, and that is why they think children need to be sprinkled and dedicated shortly after birth. Of course, we do not read of sprinkling in the scriptures as being baptism. Rather, the baptism of the Bible is a burial in water, and it is for the remission of sins. Never was it intended for a baby or child, but for accountable beings, those who desire to obey the Lord.

Because so many are ignorant of the word of God, they believe and practice many things that are contrary to the scriptures. They also do their children and other children a great disservice by sprinkling them during their infant years. Then those children grow up being told that they have already been baptized

and that they are already saved. This is not true. They never were lost as infants, and they were not scripturally baptized, since the one baptism (Ephesians 4:5) is a burial in water (Acts 8:38). But such children grow up thinking that they were saved while a child. Therefore, they are deceived. As Jesus said, it would have been better for a millstone to have been hanged around the neck of such adults and for them to have drowned in the depth of the sea than to have deceived a little child and to cause him to be lost for all time and eternity. This expression emphasizes the seriousness of dealing with children, and especially in teaching them. We must be very careful, for we are dealing with the future of their souls.

Jesus was saying that a little child can teach us a great deal. As a matter of fact, we must be converted or change our lives to be like them. That is, they have the qualities that we need in our lives as accountable beings. Surely the Lord, being the master teacher that He was, would not have used a little child as an example, or encourage us to be converted and to become like them, if they were full of sin, if they were wicked and evil. To the contrary, He knew that they represented the very best, and, therefore, we should be like them to follow Him and to be a part of His coming kingdom. The same idea holds true even to this day. We must humble ourselves and be converted and become as little children to enter the church. Then as children of God we are to retain those qualities in our lives and to grow in them if we are to be the kind of people the Lord would have us to be.

What kind of person are you? Have you humbled yourself to the point where you are willing to obey the Lord? If not, then you still have too much pride. Carnal pride will keep you out of the Lord's kingdom. You see, you must comply with His terms

before He will accept you and add you to His church. You cannot come on your own terms. Christ demands unconditional surrender.

## Lesson 22

# The Word of God Will Never Pass Away

Jesus said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away*" (Matthew 24:35).

I want to use this statement to impress on your mind the importance of the Lord's word, and the fact that it will last forever. We can't afford to ignore something that is eternal.

The Bible is not just another book. It was not written by man, but it is from God. Therefore, you need to read and study it so that you will know what it teaches. You especially need to know what it is saying to *you*. In the day of judgment, ignorance will be no excuse.

To appreciate the word of God, especially in written form, let us read from the scriptures to see how it all came about. We will go first to Hebrews 1:1,2 where it says, "*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.*" During the Old Testament period of time, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets. It was in the beginning of that era that God gave the Ten Commandments and all of the law to Moses, but then and finally He has revealed His will to us by His Son, Jesus Christ.

When Christ came into the world, He became God's spokesman. We read, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the*

*Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God*" (John 1:1,2). At the time of the transfiguration of Christ, the record says concerning Him. *"While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* (Matthew 17:5). God spoke from the beginning through the prophets, and then He sent His Son to speak for Him. But Christ could remain on the earth for only a short time. Who would speak for God after His departure? Jesus chose twelve apostles to carry on His work, but they were human beings, uneducated, forgetful, and subject to error. To be sure that only the truth was taught, Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit upon them to guide them into all truth. He said to the apostles, *"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come"* (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. As a result, they spoke in other languages, preached the gospel of Christ, and healed all manner of diseases.

But this was not all. The Holy Spirit guided chosen men of God to write down His will. This had been done even in Old Testament times through the prophets. Peter said, *"For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit"* (2 Peter 1:21). Paul wrote in the New Testament, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy

3:16,17). Again, Peter said, *“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue”* (2 Peter 1:2,3). You will notice in these verses that a key word stands out, and that word is **knowledge**. The Lord has provided His will that we might have full knowledge of Him and what He expects of us. He doesn't want us to remain in ignorance and darkness. He wants us to read and study, search the scriptures, and hear the word of God in order that faith might be produced in our hearts and lives (2 Timothy 2:15; John 5:39; Romans 10:17).

James says that the word of God is the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). He also says that we are to be doers of the word (James 1:22). Peter says that it is through obeying the truth that our souls are purified. Listen to him: *“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever. Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you”* (1 Peter 1:22-25).

Again Peter tells us of the importance of abiding by the word of God: *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen”* (1 Peter 4:11).

John tells us in Revelation 22:18,19 that we are not to add to God's word or subtract from it. He warns that if we do, we will have to suffer the consequences. Likewise, Paul reminds us that if we preach another gospel, other than that which has already been preached, then the curse of God will rest on us (Galatians 1:6-9). In other words, God has give us His word through Christ and the inspired men of God, and He wants us to leave it as it is. If He had wanted to say something else, He would have done so Himself. We are to respect His word, believe it, and obey it. Then it can work in our lives for good. This is the only way it can bless us.

The Bible, the word of God, tells us where we come from, why we are here, and where we are going. It reveals the three periods of time: the Patriarchal age, the Mosaical age, and the Christian age. God's word tells us about God, Christ His Son, and the Holy Spirit. It tells us of Christ's coming, His life, His work, His death, burial and resurrection and His return to the Father in heaven. The New Testament portion reveals the gospel of Christ, tells of the establishment of the Lord's church, how to live the Christian life, and gives us a picture of heaven and hell. God's word, when read and studied, will produce faith, lead one to obey the Lord, help one to grow and develop as a Christian, and give hope of eternal life. It also condemns sin, religious error, and shows what the consequences of sin are.

You cannot really be an educated person without a knowledge of the Bible. You can not be saved until you obey its teachings, and you will not go to heaven unless you allow it to direct you to that heavenly abode.

God's word, the Bible, is to be found throughout the world. It is the world's best seller, having been translated into more lan-



guages than any other book. It is God's living word, and it will never die. It can bring life to the one who believes it and obeys its teachings. Christ said that His words are spirit and life.

Peter said that the Lord's word would endure forever. Christ said that heaven and earth would pass away but that His words would never pass away. The devil and all of his workers have not been able to destroy it to this day, and neither will they be able to do so in the future. Christ said that if we reject Him and His word we have one that will judge us in the last day — His word (John 12:48). There are those who reject God's message, try to change it, or feel that the Lord will surely not be so strict at the judgment as He has said He will be. But bear in mind that the word of the Lord has already been spoken, and it will read in the judgment even as it does now. What you read in that book, now, with the opportunity today to believe and obey, will be read to you as your judge in the last day. Take heed how you deal with it.

How blessed we are to have God's very word in our hands. How we should love it and treasure it. What blessings it can bring into our lives if we will only allow it to lead us and direct us in all that we say and do.

Let me encourage you to read and study this book, the Bible, and do what it teaches. Believe in God, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins, as God's word teaches, and the Lord will save you and add you to His church. That's a beginning, but it is only a beginning — and I pray that you would continue to follow the teachings of the Lord all the days of your life so that heaven one day might be yours.

## Lesson 23

# The Blood of the New Testament

Jesus said, *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28).

This statement was made by Jesus when He was instituting the Lord's Supper. We will have more to say about these other matters later, but just now we want to think about Christ's blood and why it was called the blood of the New Testament.

In reading and studying the Bible, we know that God had a law for His people, set forth first in what is called the Old Testament. It was a law of works, a law without a savior, although one was promised. It was a time in which God required animal sacrifices, blood offerings to atone for sins. This did not permanently take away sin. The Hebrew writer, looking back on that period and thinking also about the situation at that time, said, *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4).

As we continue to read the scripture we are informed that God the Father sent His own Son into the world to live and die on the cross, thus shedding His blood for the sins of the whole world. Man was a sinner and could not save himself. Animal sacrifices were not perfect offerings, and, therefore, could not actually remove sin. Man's salvation required a perfect sacrifice, and so Christ came to be that perfect sacrifice. We are told that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John

3:16). Christ Himself said, *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”* Paul said, *“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him”* (Romans 5:6-9).

When we understand what the old law could not do, and what Christ did for us, I ask: Why would anyone want to go back to that law? And yet, because of a lack of study, or because of a misunderstanding of the scripture, and as a result of false teachers, there are those who do just that.

When you turn to the book of Hebrews and read through it, you can’t help but be impressed again with the fact that the old law is inferior in every way to the law of Christ. There is little comparison between animal sacrifices and the sacrifice Christ made on the cross for the sins of the world. We read concerning Christ, *“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (Hebrews 5:8,9). Going back to Hebrews 9:11-17, we read, *“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of*

*Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives."*

So, what do we have? We have man lost in sin, unable to save himself. We have man under a law that provided no savior. Therefore God sent a perfect sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, Jesus Christ. Through His death on the cross, He took out of the way the old law and gave a new and better law under which it is possible for one and all to be saved. But how could the shedding of even the blood of Christ make it possible for man to be saved from his sins? Man was a sinner, an enemy of God. A price had to be paid for that sin. Sinful man could not come into the presence of God. But Christ, in His perfection, could come before God with the sacrifice of his blood instead of man, atoning for man's sin, to hide, to cover, to remove, to destroy sin from God's sight. Therefore, through the death of Christ, man was redeemed, bought back, saved from his sin. Christ became man's reconciler, man's mediator, standing between God and man, making it possible for man through Christ to return to God.

But there are conditions. First of all, man is not only required to believe in God, but also in Christ. Next, he is expected to repent of all of his sins, to give up his old sins. Then he must confess Christ before men as being the Son of God. And finally, he must imitate the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection in his

obedience by being buried in the waters of baptism. In other words, man dies to his sin, he is buried or immersed in water, and he is raised, resurrected, from the water. You may read this in Romans 6. But in this obedience, one comes into contact with the blood of Christ and the benefits of His death. He becomes a child of God. Another way of putting it, as recorded in John 3:3-5, through obedience one is born again, born into the Lord's family, the church. God becomes his Father, and he becomes God's child.

In Ephesians 1:7 we read, "*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*" Then in Colossians 1:14 Paul wrote, "*...in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*" Christ said in our text, "*For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*" (Matthew 26:28). Peter and the other apostles preached on the day of Pentecost to a large audience of sinners. When the hearers were convinced that Christ was the Son of God, the Savior of man, they wanted to know what they should do. They were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Saul was told, on the basis of his faith and repentance, to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Christ said that one should believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16).

Now, does the blood of Christ, having been shed for the remission of sins, have anything to do with the fact that when man believes and is baptized, he is saved, and that his obedience to Christ washes away his sin? Yes, there is a definite connection here. As we have already pointed out, when one meets the conditions the Lord has set forth, that is, when one obeys His com-

mands, then he comes into contact with the blood of Christ and his sins are washed away. How do we know that happens? Because we read that it does, and the Lord promises to forgive those who obey Him.

Along with this, we are told that Christ died on the cross that the church might be purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28). Who makes up the church? Christians, those who have obeyed the Lord and have been saved by the blood of Christ. Paul also says that Christians are bought with a price, meaning that the price was the shedding of the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20). Then to the Christian, John says that if we will continue faithful to the Lord, always walking in the light, that is, in the light of Christ, then His blood continues to take away our sins (1 John 1:7).

And finally, as Christians we continue to remember the price Christ paid for us on the cross in His suffering and the shedding of His blood, as we meet each first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper. We partake of the bread in remembrance of the body of Christ, and we partake of the cup, the fruit of the vine, in remembrance of the blood of Christ. Thus, through this act, we are telling the world that we believe in Christ and that we believe He will come again. You may read all of this in Matthew 26:26-29.

How wonderful it is that we have a savior who was willing to die for us that we might be saved. I might add that He is not a dead savior, but a living one. Do you have a savior? Did He die for you, that you might have your sins forgiven? My friend, Christ is the only one who has done that. He is man's only savior. I want to encourage you to believe in Him and to obey Him that you might be saved.

## The Authority of Christ

We read, *"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Note that Jesus said that all power was given to Him in heaven and in earth. Another word for this is authority. Authority, of course, is power, the right to speak, to act, to command. You will remember that after Jesus gave His sermon on the mount, the record says, *"And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes"* (Matthew 7:28,29).

To understand the authority and power of Christ, we must understand who He is. Christ was with God in the beginning, and by Him and through Him all things were created (Hebrews 1:1,2; Colossians 1:16,17). He was sent by God the Father into this world to die on the cross for the sins of mankind. Paul says of God and Christ, in speaking to the Ephesian Christians, *"Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your*

*understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:15-23).*

Let us read further in the scriptures in order that we might see the position Christ had and why He has the power that He has today. Paul, in writing to the church at Philippi, said, *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).*

You will notice in the passages of scripture we have read that Christ is pictured as being from God, that He died for the sins of man, that He was resurrected, that He is at the right hand of God, that He reigns over all things, that He has a name which is above



every name, and that He has all power and glory in heaven and in earth. This is why He is said to have all power and authority.

Christ is able to speak with authority from the position of having been equal with God, being God's Son, having died and been resurrected from the grave, sitting at the right hand of God with a name that is above every name, and being the head of His church. Concerning this last point, I would like for you to read a few verses of scripture. Paul said concerning Christ, "*And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence*" (Colossians 1:18). To the Ephesian Christians he said, "*For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*" (Ephesians 5:23,24). Note again what was said about Christ and the position He occupies as head of the church. He is "*the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He might have the preeminence.*" We are also told that Christ, being the head of the church, the church is subject to Him. The head directs, gives instructions concerning what the rest of the members of the body should do, and they carry out those instructions. That is exactly the way it is with Christ and His church. Christians, members of the body of Christ, the church of Christ, are not in position to talk back, to rebel, to direct themselves, that is, as long as they are going to look to Christ as the head of the church.

In Acts 3:22-26 the writer said, "*For Moses truly said to the fathers, The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall be that every soul who will not*

*hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."*

Observe from the foregoing that Moses had prophesied that God would raise up a prophet or teacher from among them, like unto Himself, and they would hear whatever He had to say. Then he said that every soul who would not hear Him would be destroyed. This shows the power and authority He has over all things.

Although Christ does not destroy people physically for not hearing and obeying Him, all such people will one day be destroyed for their lack of respect for Him and His word. Christ said, *"And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to **judge** the world but to **save** the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the **word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day**"* (John 12:47,48).

In every phase of life there has to be some standard authority, some weight or measurement, some body of laws by which everyone must abide. The postal people must have authority to issue stamps before those stamps can be recognized and accepted. If several different ones were issuing stamps and each one charged a different price, this could be confusing. The police have to have authority to force people to keep the law. The courts of the land must have the power to try law-breakers and to sen-

tence them. The schoolmaster must have the power or authority to enforce the rules of school. And we could list hundreds of other examples, but the point is clear.

Likewise, in religious matters there has to be one who is recognized as having power and authority to speak, to act, to command, to bless, and even to punish. If all claim to have power, and all speak differently, then this will result in nothing but confusion. This is the case in the religious world in general. All kinds of things are taught and practiced, but someone — a lot of someones as a matter of fact — are wrong because they have assumed and followed authority that is not lawful.

Do you recognize the authority of Jesus Christ? By what authority do you do the things you do? We are told in Colossians 3:17 that we are to do all in the name of Christ, which means *by His authority*. Peter commanded the people on the day of Pentecost to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, by His authority (Acts 2:38).

We are to respect the authority of our Lord when it comes to what He has said one must do to be saved. In Mark 16:16 He clearly stated, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*" This is the one and only way that man can be saved. There are other gospels taught, but the curse of the Lord rests on all such people (Galatians 1:6-9).

We are to accept the Lord's authority when it comes to the church. He said that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18), and He did, adding the saved to it (Acts 2:47). There is one church (Ephesians 4:4-6), He is the savior of it (Ephesians 5:23), and He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18). To teach and

uphold other churches, denominations, and other religions, means that the authority of Christ is rejected. Such people are trying to compete with the Lord. He says one thing, but they say something else. Who is right? If you accept the authority of Christ, you must take your stand with the Lord.

There are dozens of things that we could bring up to demonstrate the point we are making in this lesson, but remember that if you reject the Lord's word, then you reject Him, and if you reject Him you reject the only Lord and Savior mankind has.

Let me encourage you to come to Christ, recognizing Him as having all power in heaven and earth. Although you are a sinner, He will save you if you will submit to His authority. He requires so little but gives so much in return. Believe in Him, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins. He will save you and add you to His church. He is ready to save you when you are ready to obey Him.